

Hell Overfloweth

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By a twist of fate, Eren Yeager is the one to die instead of his mother when Wall Maria falls, devastating Carla and Mikasa. Five years later, Hange and Squad Levi find a boy wandering alone in titan territory. The scouts take him in, yet the mystery of Eren Yeager grows with every day. What is he? The hunter or the haunted? Or something else entirely?

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The Child Found

Hell Overfloweth

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"Have a good trip!" Eren called, waving to the retreating figure of his father.

Carla sighed. She wanted to reiterated her rather negative opinion on Eren's dream to one day join the Scout Regiment, but she knew her son. He had her opinionated temper; saying anything more right now would just upset him and make him run off, leaving them both angry and frustrated. For now, a more subtle approach was needed. "Eren, go to your room."

"What?!" Eren asked in alarm at the sudden punishment. "Is this about me wanting to join the Scouts still?!"

"No," she lied through her teeth. "It's for lying earlier about the firewood. Just stay in your room for the night."

Eren sulked but otherwise accepted the reason. "Fine. Can I at least finish eating first?"

"Of course you're finishing your supper! I'm grounding you, not starving you," Carla answered pointedly, ushering him in and giving Mikasa a look, silently asking her to keep an eye on the boy. "I'll be back in a bit, I need to go to the market."

Mikasa nodded, following after Eren into the house.

*Carla could distinctly hear Eren saying something snide to Mikasa for **snitching** on him. She just shook her head as she started to walk down the path through town. She sometimes wondered where Eren got his ideas from. He seemed more like the son of Keith Shadis sometimes than that of the doctor she married. Grisha was always*

so calm, polite, and rational. Eren's temper and strong sense of opinions were like her own personality, true, but joining the Scouts? Risking death by titans to see the outside world?

She felt her frustrations melt away as she lost herself in the sights and sounds of her home town and continued her stroll through Shinganshina. The children playing, a mother hanging her clothes, an old man sitting on the side of a bridge.

Carla paused and did a double take at the old man and his rather distinctive hat, smiling as recognition set in. "Enjoying the view, Aster?" she asked as she approached the man.

Aster Arlert smiled in a way only grandparents seemed capable of doing. "Ahh, Carla Yeager, it's been a while," he greeted with a tip of his hat to her. "I take it by that look on your face, you've been butting heads with that wild boy of yours."

"Is it that obvious?" Carla asked with a defeated smile.

"Only to those that know you and your family," Aster answered with a chortle in his throat. "Come, I'll lend an ear if you want. If not, the sunset will be lovely," Aster offered, motioning to the spot to his left.

Carla wordlessly took the offer, enjoying the silence for now. They had come to know each other well ever since Eren took up Armin as a friend, which began his never-ending crusade against the local bullies. Admirable as the intent may be, his excessiveness with the other children caused her no end of headaches and Eren no small amount of bruises and cuts. Even if she was proud of Eren for sticking up for his friends, she wished he had some better self-control.

"What brings you out here?" Carla asked idly to break the ice.

"Armin had a run in with some bullies," Aster answered with a hum, looking up at the sky briefly. "There is a time when a child wants

consoling and attention, and a time when they want space for themselves."

Carla nodded in understanding. Eren was more the latter than the former. She paused briefly, to consider her words. But the more she did, the more she realized there was no other words to consider. "Eren wants to join the Scouts."

Aster hummed in acknowledgement and understanding. It went without saying that Aster knew her worries well. He too had children that had wanted to go beyond the Walls, and now he was raising a parentless grandson. "That boy has always been like that. I sometimes wonder if it's not this town," he mused, looking at the Wall briefly. "We're all stuck behind walls, but to that boy, the space must feel even smaller when he can see walls all around us."

"He'll die if he goes, Aster. All of them do, except the ones that come back broken. If not their bodies, then their spirits," Carla answered with a sad voice. "I'm not sure what would kill me more. Being brought back nothing but a limb of my precious boy... or to see him return one day with his soul crushed and his eyes robbed of that bright light in them?"

"And all he sees is you trying to control him, to give up on his dream and settle into a simple life," Aster guessed, his tone lamenting.

"Is it so bad that, that he's right?" Carla asked, staring at the brick path below her feet. "That I want my child to live a safe life? To grow old and fall in love? Is it so wrong for a parent to only hope their child will be happy one day? Not great, not special, just... happy? Content? Alive?"

"That is what all parents should want," Aster answered a headshake. "I just worry, Carla."

"About what?" she asked, looking over to him curiously.

"That some children will just never be happy behind these walls," Aster answered with a breath. "Your son is a boy, a young lad that doesn't know what it's really like. But my boy and his wife were full-grown, even had a child, and they still wanted to try to fulfill that dream, to go outside the wall. Their desire for it was so strong, they tried it knowing they would risk leaving their child an orphan. They were a happy family, but it wasn't enough. And my grandson doesn't resent that. He has the same longing in his heart, I think."

Carla let those words sink in, watching geese fly along the wall. "Is it truly so terrible behind these walls? Is the outside world really worth that much risk?"

Neither one had an answer, and they didn't have time to think of one.

Carla's eyes went wide as she saw a flash of something across the sky. "Wha-?" she started, before the ground seemed to bounce out from under her with a great boom, leaving her and Aster tumbling to the ground.

"Ohhhhhh!" The old man groaned, rolling onto his stomach as Carla picked herself up. "What was that?" he asked slowly, hoping nothing was broken.

"I don't know," Carla stated as she held out a hand and helped pull him up. "It looked like it came from-"

"Hmm? Carla?" Aster called, looking at her paling face, eyes widen in horror as her mouth hung open with wordless noises caught in her throat. With dread growing in his own eyes, he turned to follow her gaze, and saw a nightmare made manifest.

There was something on the wall. Something huge, red, and covered in dust or clouds. No, steam. He swallowed harshly as he saw the top of a massive and skinless head rising over the top of the wall. "That... that can't be," he muttered, his mind trying to deny the reality he was witnessing.

"That's a Titan," Carla whispered hollowly. "A Titan over fifty meters tall...," she finished, her brow scrunching as it seemed to bow its head. "What is it doing?"

Aster figured it out before it happened. "Carla, get down, now!" he yelled, ducking down under the stone rails of the bridge.

Carla did so without thinking, just as she heard a thunderous noise, followed by a unimaginably powerful and long gust of wind, with a series of smaller crashes. "What... what just happened?" she asked numbly as she stood back up, seeing the oversized Titan seem to duck down or even leave.

"It kicked in the gate," Aster said with deep breaths.

"Kicked in? But that-" Carla nearly died in fear as she realized what was about to happen. "The Titans. The children!" she exclaimed, turning to run as fast as she could for her home. Aster didn't call after her, already heading off towards his own home.

Carla was scarcely aware of the people she ran by as she took off running in the opposite direction. She could barely even feel her feet as they ran faster than she ever had in her life. She was only aware of where she was, which way to go, how far to her home, her babies. She saw the corner, knowing that just around it she would see her house, her home. It would be there, safe and sou-

"No," she whispered, coming to a dead stop as her face paled. "No, no, no!" If she was anyone else, she might have fainted at the sight of a giant boulder crushing her home, her heart. As it was, she nearly vomited, but kept it down as she ran up the steps. "EREN! MIKASA!" she yelled at the top of her lungs, praying for them to be alive, to have not been inside the house.

"AUNT CARLA! HELP!"

That yell terrified her. Mikasa never yelled like that.

She reached the top and saw a scene she dreaded. Mikasa was bleeding from her head somewhere, crouching to try and move a very large beam, which was pinning Eren's small body under it. Her son, her baby laid there with an eerily peaceful look, blood dripping from him and... and...

He was still breathing.

He was trapped, injured and alive.

And the Titans were coming. She could see their heads over the buildings in the distance, hear the screams in the town.

No, no, no! This wasn't what she wanted! She didn't want Eren alive just to die at the jaws of a titan!

She was instantly at her adopted daughter's side, trying to lift the debris. Carla was not a weakling, but the beam was heavy and stuck in place.

"Mom...? Mikasa...?" Eren moaned weakly.

"It's okay, Sweetie! Mommy's here," Carla said with tears in her eyes, not sure if she was trying to convince herself or him. "Mikasa, can you see where he's stuck!?"

Mikasa stopped trying to lift, quickly crouching down to look between a gap in the wood and let out a gasp.

"Mikasa?" Carla called urgently. Mikasa looked up with a broken expression on her face.

"Gah!" Eren screamed and grunted. "Ugh! Something... hurts! It's in my stomach. It's really warm... and really wet."

"He's impaled," Mikasa whispered as Carla nearly fell apart in despair.

Even if she got Eren out, he would probably bleed to death in a matter of minutes. If she did nothing, he might live long enough to be eaten by a Titan.

Without warning, Mikasa was already starting to try and lift the beam once more. "COME ON! COME ON!" she yelled pleadingly.

"It's the Titans, isn't it?" Eren asked groggily with a smirk that was somehow both defeated and victorious. "Knew it was only a matter of time, waiting in here like cattle..."

"Shut up! This isn't the time for that, Eren!" Carla yelled, reaching to begin trying to lift again- or she was about to, when she saw a Titan, with a disturbing smile on its face round the corner.

It was looking right at them. There was no one else in its path to distract it.

"Get out of here."

Carla blinked slowly, tearfully as she looked down in disbelief, unable to accept those words as reality. Mikasa mirrored her expression as they looked to Eren.

"Both of you... ! Just run away!" Eren yelled, forcing himself to not sound any weaker than he had to. "I know enough from Dad... I'm already dead. My body just hasn't figured that out yet."

"No, Eren! We're not leaving you here!" Mikasa yelled desperately when Carla couldn't form the words to this unbearable situation.

"Dammit! Mikasa! I didn't kill two people for you to die here like this!" Eren yelled out in frustration. "Just get your clingy, scarf-obsessed self out of here!"

"... You can insult me all you want, I'm not leaving you!" Mikasa said tearfully. "I can't lose you! I'd rather die!"

Carla watched the display numbly, looking around at the debris as a horrible, terrible idea came to her head.

There was a long piece of glass right next to her, resting against the ground as the footstep grew closer.

If she couldn't save Eren, she should at least spare him the suffering of being eaten. Right?

She made to reach for it... only to be beaten to the punch. Her eyes widened as she saw Eren's arm stretch out and grab the shard as hard as he could. "Eren...?" she said in disbelief.

"Mom, please... go," Eren begged with tears in his eyes. "Please... don't make me watch you both die with me."

"Eren... I... I can't-" Carla said, knowing she should, that she had to, but how could she leave her son like this?

"Never thought I'd see you giving up, Eren!"

The two females turned to see a familiar blond soldier, Eren just grunting at his voice. "Hannes! Help us, quick!" Carla pleaded urgently.

Hannes took a cautious glance to the titan as he quickly moved to try and lift the beam with them, all three of them straining.

"It's working, it's working!" Mikasa exclaimed in hope. "Just a-"

"GAHHHH!" Eren screamed in agony, a sickening crunch emitting from his body.

"Damn!" Hannes cursed as they let the beam back down, unable to move it further. "I'll go deal with this titan, then come back and help!"

"Just take them and run, you damn drunk!" Eren yelled, desperation beneath the thin veil of rage.

Hannes ignored the call as he ran forward. 'Come on Hannes, time to make good on that debt,' the man thought to himself, trying to steel himself. 'Time to prove that brat wrong about'

He froze and stared up at the Titan with fear, the first time seeing humanity's enemy up close.

His face contorted with tears. "... I'm sorry, Eren, Grisha," he whispered before sheathing his blades.

He ran.

Carla was ripped away from the beam as Hannes returned and quickly put her over his shoulder before picking up Mikasa under the other arm. "Wait, what are you doing?!" Mikasa screamed in fury and terror. "Eren!"

"Finally did something right, you old drunk," Eren murmured, trying to smirk even as blood started to pool in his mouth. Still, he held tight to the glass as he felt the footsteps becoming ominously large. "Well, come get me, you bastard," he said defiantly, focusing on the pain in his gut and hand.

If he did, maybe he wouldn't give this monster the satisfaction of seeing him cry as he died.

"No... No..." Carla whispered as her shock wore off, struggling out of Hannes's grasp. She was on her own feet again and trying to pull away from the soldier. "I can't leave him like that!"

Hannes had tears in his eyes as he struggled to keep hold of her arm. "Carla, you can't sav-"

"JUST GO ALREADY, YOU OLD HAG! DON'T YOU SEE I DON'T WANT YOU HERE?!" Eren screamed, even as his lungs burned from the effort.

"Eren..." Carla whispered. Even now, about to die a cruel death, her son was screaming for them to save themselves. "Eren! I'm sorry! I love you, so much!" Carla yelled, tears in her eyes before she turned to run with Hannes.

"Love you too, Mom," Eren said weakly, knowing they couldn't hear him. "Sorry I made you cry again, Mikasa..."

"No! No, we can't... we can't leave him..." Mikasa whimpered as she watched the Titan now looming above the wreckage that was their home. "Please, not you too. Not again."

Carla grabbed Mikasa out of Hannes arms, holding her tight. "Don't look, Mikasa, don't look," she implored, even as Mikasa forced herself to look over her mother's shoulder, her head pounding.

The Titan was there, grabbing Eren out of the wreckage.

Carla, against her own words, looked on as well as they ran. And all she could do was curse the Goddesses for not letting Eren die before that monster grabbed him.

"So, this is how I die," Eren murmured numbly as he was lifted up, somewhere between numb from the pain, angry at the situation, and shock from the inevitability of his own death. "Still... I'll make this meal as tough as I can, you bastard," Eren said as he glared to the face of his killer. He clutched the glass so hard that blood oozed from his palm.

With a defiant, wrathful scream, he stabbed at the titan's hand.

It was pointless, futile, not even doing any damage. Not even a scratch. But he didn't care. It made him feel better, made it easier to ignore the pain in his body and the fear of being eaten.

That didn't stop the tears. He was going to die, like cattle, without ever having a taste of freedom. He didn't even get a chance to see what was so important in the basement for crying out loud.

He was faintly aware that he was being brought towards the mouth.

His life flashed before his eyes, short as it was: All those times playing with Armin and fighting the bullies. Saving Mikasa- and wondering how she ever needed saving when all she seemed to do was rescue him after that. Scoldings from his loving mother, traveling and learning from his father. Getting mad at Hannes and his soldier friends for being lazy.

With one last defiant scream for his life, he stabbed the shard between two of the teeth.

He idly wondered how long that would stay stuck for.

And then the mouth chomped down.

He couldn't even scream as he felt the teeth cutting through his back and his chest, his ribs being crushed and stabbing his lungs. It was all just white hot agony, a sense of falling, and then... nothing.

"NO! EEEEEEEEN, NO!" Mikasa wailed as they ran far, far away. Carla forced herself to keep going, to keep moving forward. If she didn't, she might lose both children today.

"Dammit..." Hannes said with gritted teeth. 'How worthless can you be?! One kid, you couldn't even save one bullheaded kid!' he thought to himself, feeling his shame and self-loathing grow with every step he took and every second he drew breath.

'What kind of mother am I? I couldn't even end my baby's suffering,' Carla thought wretchedly, holding onto Mikasa as a lifeline, less she fall into her own despair. Their argument flashed through her head, her grounding him to his ro- 'If I hadn't made him stay home, he would have been alive! This... this is my fault! My son is dead because of me!' she thought, tears falling freely.

'Eren... is dead,' Mikasa thought emotionlessly, her heart feeling like a great, hollow chasm as that horrible image replayed in her head.

'He... he wanted to go out when we heard the explosion. I told him to stay while I went to check. That... that's the only reason I survived, I was outside when the house was crushed. If I hadn't told him to stay... none of this would have happened!' *she thought brokenly, her head pounding as she gripped her scarf desperately.* 'I'm sorry, Eren. You did so much for me and I... I got you killed. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry!'

And so they ran, even as the boy's blood sprayed over what had once been his home...

Erwin Smith frowned while the Scout Regiment stopped in the remains of a small hamlet. He had no reason to be displeased, he knew, but something felt off.

The 55th Expedition was a resounding success so far, comparatively. Their casualties were very light, their supplies had not been compromised in any way and they had successfully set up two new supply points.

That was the problem though. Things were going too well so far. Titan activity had been light and it shouldn't be. They were fifty kilometers from Trost, roughly half the distance to Wall Maria. In the southern area, there should have been many more Titans this far out.

It was one thing if it was just his own suspicions, but he could see it all over Levi's and Miche's faces. They were uneasy, feeling like he did; that a shoe was about to drop, right on top of them.

There were only a few things Erwin could think of to cause this. The first was a group of humans had somehow made it outside Wall Rose and were attracting the Titans to them. Highly unlikely, the group would have to be too big to cause this kind of reaction, and would have been slaughtered by now unless they were all equipped and heavily trained. And he knew there weren't that many quality soldiers suddenly missing.

The second option was that something, somehow, was attracting Titans elsewhere. A vastly unsettling notion for too many reasons to consider.

The third option was literally anything else. In a world as ignorant and unknown as theirs, there was always a chance the answer was something you could never even fathom.

A smoke flair went off. He had a feeling the shoe had just dropped.

"Erwin!"

"What is it, Miche?" he asked, the man's face looking so serious and alarmed that Erwin knew his nose had picked something up.

"Two from the south, moving very rapidly this way," he informed grimly. "Possibly abnormals by the looks of one."

"Levi," Erwin called, glancing to the shorter man, already on his horse.

"Right," Levi answered, galloping off with his personal squad right at his heels.

"Hoooy! Levi!" Hange called, riding up alongside them.

"Section Commander?!" Eld and Petra called in surprise, the other two just groaning.

"What are you doing, Four Eyes?" Levi asked in mild annoyance.

"Hehe, I hear it might be two abnormals, Levi. You know I can't resist at least getting a good look at those before you go off and butcher the poor things," Hange said with a small blush and creepy smile on her face.

"Just don't get yourself killed," Levi ordered, his squadmates just shaking their heads at the familiar exchange.

"Fifteen meter, up ahead!" Gunther called, spying a fat bellied giant to the southeast, running with its arms held up and moving in a manner that resembled something between a chicken and jogging.

"Where's the other one?" Petra asked with a furrowed brow.

"Maybe Miche's nose is acting up?" Orou suggested, trying to act calm and cool.

"Keep your eyes peeled, it could be a tiny bastard," Levi remarked.

As if prompted by his words, a four meter titan barreled over a hill, also running with its scrawny form and a permanent grimace upon its face.

"There he is," Levi murmured, instantly taking stock of the situation.

There weren't a lot of trees out here, which was why Erwin had sent them- they could pull this off with minimal risk if there were just one or two Titans, giving the main force of the regiment the few minutes they needed to prepare to retreat if needed.

"Hey, Captain?" Gunther spoke up with a scowl. "Is it just me, or is that big Titan not heading straight for us?"

They all realized he was right, seeing the Titan's path would take it directly past the group's left, and it showed no sign of changing course. The smaller one, however, was making dead straight for them.

"If it's an abnormal, it might head for the largest group of humans instead of the closest," Hange speculated with a hum.

"I'll deal with the big one," Levi ordered abruptly. "Eld, Gunther, take the tiny bastard. The rest of you, take Hange... and find out what the hell that is to the Southwest."

Everyone looked in surprise to where he was looking, seeing something moving on the hill. A two meter titan? "Ohohohoho! Good

eye, Levi!" Hange called, riding off ahead.

"Section Commander!" Olou called, cursing as she continued on, forcing him and Petra to take off after her.

"Good luck, Captain!" Petra called as they all followed after the mad woman.

Levi just rolled his eyes, nodding to the other two before turning his horse to intercept the larger titan, to get a bit closer.

Hange, while very excited and deep in speculation, was keenly aware of her surroundings. "It's not too often we find such a tiny Titan!" she declared eagerly, keeping her eyes peeled. She couldn't see it anymore, meaning it had wandered to the other side of the hill before it could notice them. A smaller size should mean a smaller range of its senses, after all.

She tensed as she she reached the crest of the hill, knowing danger could be just out of sight, but was more perplexed than disappointed when she found nothing at all.

"Section Comm- Eh? There's nothing here?" Olou asked, confused and possibly annoyed.

"No, Levi definitely saw something, we all did," Hange stated firmly.

"Could it have just been an animal?" Petra asked, knowing they did get occasional false sightings with small Titans and large animals.

"Maybe," Hange acknowledged, knowing that eyesight at a distance could only account for so much if the target was of insufficient size. Still, she had been positive it had been an upright creature. Years fighting and studying titans made it hard to mistake that anymore. Her eyes scanned from left to right for anything to provide an explanation.

It didn't take her long to find it, off to the right, but she had trouble believing her sight.

"What is...?" she asked in shock, catching the attention of the Team Levi members.

"Hm, what is it?" Olou asked, turning to follow her gaze... before he nearly fell off his horse. "Is that a person?! Without a horse?!"

"No, wait," Petra said, eyes wide. "I... I think that's a child!"

"A child?! We're half way to Maria, what child could possibly be out here!?" Olou questioned, not sure if he was trying to imply she or the situation itself was illogical.

"We'll never find out just waiting here!" Hange retorted, sending her horse forward to bolt towards the potentially-young traveler.

The closer they got, the more Hange realized that Petra was right. The proportions were all wrong for them to be a human suffering from some form of dwarfism. It was definitely a child, preteens by the looks of them. But how did a child survive in Titan territory?!

And it just occurred to Hange. This person, this child was not running. They were walking.

Not even away from where the Titans had ran, but instead towards them, to the North.

She came to a stop, just a few feet from the mysterious child, the two scouts coming to a halt behind her.

There was an awkward silence as they stared at the child, the boy lost amongst a land of Titans. What did they even say?

He was small, young, perhaps only ten. His body and head were mainly hidden by a black cloak, ragged with holes and decorated with burn marks. His face was covered by the hood of his cloak and

a long scarf around his neck, stained an oily black with the ends of the scarf hanging down over his back.

And he was still walking, just walking. In fact, he didn't even seem to notice they were there yet.

"Umm, hello?" Petra called, breaking the silence. "Are you... okay?"

When the boy finally stopped, Olou and Petra couldn't help feeling on edge. Hange leaned forward in anticipation, watching every inch of the child as he turned to look at them.

There was a gasp, an inhale, and some stiffening all around. Hange's eyes widened before settling grimly. The boy was dark haired and his skin was pale, far too pale. But the look in his green eyes was what caught them. Hange had seen that look many times, too many times, but she hated seeing it most on a child. Those wary, cynical eyes stared at them with a half-lidded gaze. He didn't look relieved or surprised to see them. He didn't seem to care at all.

He looked like he had been through Hell.

Without another word, Hange got off her horse and walked over to the boy, kneeling down to his level with what she hoped was one of her less disturbing smiles. "Hey, kiddo. You want to come with us? We can take you somewhere safe, okay?" she offered kindly.

He stared at her for a moment, and the half of Levi Squad present wondered how the Section Commander would even react or what she would even do if the boy declined. They couldn't just leave this alone, leave a child wandering out here beyond the safety of Wall Rose. They were saved from that bizarre situation as the boy nodded slowly.

"Okay, I'm going to pick you up now to help you on my horse. Is that okay?" Hange asked politely. Once again, he nodded his acceptance and let her pick him up with a bit of effort. If she had to guess, she'd say he was just over thirty kilograms. Which was good yet confusing.

That meant the boy wasn't malnourished and starving, but how was that possible? Even ignoring the improbability of him being alive to begin with, all the food in any towns should have expired by now. He would have to be living off the wild game and plants.

Just where had this boy come from?

"Section Commander?" Olou spoke up awkwardly.

"Yes, yes, it's more than a little strange, but we can ask him questions later," Hange said with a sigh, placing the boy up in the saddle before mounting it herself, the boy now directly in front of her.

"Well, the brat at least have a name?" Olou asked, nobody even bothering to call him out on trying to act like Levi.

"Hmm? How about it? You want to tell us your name by chance?" Hange asked with a kind tone, eye smiling down at her passenger, who looked up at her. "I'm Hange Zoe."

The boy stared, the silence making them wonder if he even could speak at all, until he opened his mouth behind the scarf. And despite everything else, the boy's voice was clear and strong, "Eren Yeager."

Hange grinned, trying to sound playful and reassuring. "Nice to meet you, Mister Yeager."

End of Chapter

And here. We. Go! First chapter of this little beauty. A story of how Eren tragically died instead of Carla and seems to have now mysteriously reappeared years later without aging a day. And now the Scouts are taking him in.

There's a bit of mystery to this fic, but there's a lot of horror and hurt-comfort.

Not much else to say, I hope you all enjoyed this. I have a lot more of this coming.

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Rationing of Tears

Hell Overfloweth

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Hange was probably enjoying this more than she should be. It was a very serious and alarming situation, finding a child this deep into Titan territory.

But she couldn't help it! Seeing Levi actually stunned into silence was just too rare a treat to not savor, as he stared uncomprehending at her tiny passenger.

"How the fuck do you have a brat?" Levi asked bluntly, half his team looking very uncertain on how to answer and the other half behind him staring in befuddlement.

"Ohhh, Levi! I thought for certain you already had this talk before!" Hange said with a grin, her goggles glinting in the sun. "You see, when a male and female human decide to procreate, they take off their clothes-"

"I know how fucking fucking works, Four Eyes!" Levi snapped, reminding himself that Hange did not know the circumstance of his mother's death. She wasn't trying to be an ass to the son of a prostitute. "I meant, how is there a brat all the way out here?"

Said "brat" tilted his head to look at the short man. Levi felt most of his annoyance crumple into pity at those haunted eyes and the other scouts read it easily on his face.

"I don't know," Hange answered with full seriousness. "We found him walking on the hill."

Levi said nothing for a moment, making sure he understood the implications, his eyes narrowing minutely. "He say anything?"

"Just his name: Eren Yeager," Hange answered, patting the boy's head. "Don't mind Levi, Eren. He's always this impolite," she said teasingly.

Eren seemed to take that to heart, taking his eyes off Levi and just staring forward with an unfocused gaze.

"In any case, we need to head back. I'm sure Commander Erwin will want to meet you, Eren," Hange said encouragingly, turning her horse back to camp.

Levi shared a look with his squad and they were unanimously in agreement. There was something very, very wrong about this situation.

With that, they took after the section commander, back to the supply point...

Erwin Smith prided himself on being able to take every kind of surprise and setback calmly while quickly adapting to the new situation as needed.

That said, even he wasn't sure what to make of Hange Zoe riding back with Team Levi and a rather... small addition to their group.

Then again, everyone else seemed to be of the same mind, all the scouts looking on in confusion and disbelief.

"Hange, is that a child?" Nanaba asked in alarm while Erwin studied the child; the boy staring ahead listlessly, paying his audience no mind.

"Indeed it is!" Hange answered, simple and blunt, before turning to the commander himself. "Hoy, Commander Erwin! Seems I found a new friend."

Erwin raised a brow at her behavior, but quickly decided that it was best to continue this topic elsewhere. "Hange, report to the

command tent, now."

"Yes, Sir!" she agreed as he turned to leave, allowing herself to turn outwardly serious. "Now, let's get you down-" Hange started, only for Eren to calmly slide off the horse on his own, walking steadily towards the commander. "Hoy, hoy, wait for me! Olou, take care of my horse!"

"Wha- I'm not your assistant, Four Eyes!" Olou complained back, getting eye rolls from his teammates.

Hange paid him no mind, rushing off after the boy. "My, you're an impatient one," she stated curiously, keeping pace beside him and pointedly ignoring the looks the other Scouts were giving them. She did grow uncomfortable with the silence though. "You're not hurt, right?" she asked, scolding herself for not asking earlier.

"No," Eren answered to Hange's relief.

"And here I was beginning to think you only knew your own name," Hange stated, attempting to tease the child to no avail, relenting as they reached the tent. Inside was just her, Eren, Erwin and Miche. And, glancing over her shoulders, she realized Levi had come in behind them.

Without saying a word, Eren moved to sit on a box to the left, appearing to pay the group no mind. Miche sniffed at the air, a strange, uncertain look on his face.

Deciding to break the ice, Hange motioned to Eren with a grin towards Erwin. "Commander, allow me to introduce Eren Yeager."

Erwin looked to the boy for a moment, but seeing no reaction, turned back to Levi. "What exactly happened?" he questioned calmly.

"We spotted one of two Titans, a fifteen meter that appeared to be running for here instead of us, along with a four meter that soon followed after," Levi explained bluntly. "I sent half my team to deal

with the smaller one and dealt with the runner myself. I sent the rest with Four Eyes to investigate what we thought was going to be a two meter Titan. We regathered afterwards, with Hange saying they found this brat walking out here by himself."

"Yeah, that's the long and short of it," Hange agreed, scratching her cheek nervously.

"I see," Erwin stated before walking forward, coming down to one knee in front of Eren to be at his eye level. The boy looked up to meet the gaze. "I'm Erwin Smith. It's nice to meet you, Eren Yeager," he greeted, holding out his hand expectantly.

Eren seemed to study the man and his appendage for a moment before reaching out and returning the gesture with his smaller hand.

"You have a very strong grip, Eren," Erwin complimented, studying every reaction in and around Eren's eyes. "I'm sure you have a lot of stories to tell, young man," he stated sympathetically.

Eren retracted his hand steadily, reaching up to rub the side of his head, something... many things flashing across his eyes.

Erwin took this chance to take in the boy's appearance. The cloak was torn and burnt. The scarf was coated with something shiny and greasy. His brown trousers were worn and covered in mud- and possibly worse than mud, Erwin knew. There was no great stench though, that was a good sign. The shirt could have been white, beige, or any other light color in the past. Now it was stained a faint yellowish with patches of brown everywhere. There was a coat that went over the shirt, but it was almost ruined beyond recognition. And his shoes were a mess, looking like they might fall apart any moment.

But again, no stench. No sign of bleeding or having lacked proper meals.

He'd almost think the boy was faking it. But children can't fake that look in their eyes, children don't wind up amongst Titans for no reason.

"Would you mind sharing some of them with us?" Erwin prompted politely. "Can you tell us where you're from?"

Eren didn't speak. Instead, he used his free hand to point out of the tent. To the south, they realized quickly.

"He can't be serious," Levi murmured to himself.

"Maria? Did you come from Wall Maria?" Hange asked, somewhere between excitement and dread.

Eren nodded slowly, leaving them all with the troubling implications. "How long has it been?" Eren asked with a solemn voice.

"Hm? How long has what been, Eren?" Erwin inquired gently.

Eren just pointed southward once again.

They all grew somber at that. "It's been five years now since the wall was breached," Erwin explained grimly.

For the first time since seeing him, they saw Eren's expression change into surprise as his body shuddered. "Only five years?" he whispered behind his scarf, something cracked but unbroken in his voice. Perhaps even some twisted form of relief?

"I'm sorry. I know it must be hard think about," Erwin said as Eren lowered his head and hand. "Have you been out here all this time?"

"No," Eren answered, and there was something in his voice. Something seething, something angry as his hands curled into fists on his laps.

They were somewhat relieved. The implication that a child had been left behind and survived all these years was both amazing and

horrifying to consider.

"Then where were you, Eren?" Hange asked, unable to hold in her curiosity. "Did someone take you out here?"

"I don't... think so," Eren answered, calming down to clutch his head again.

Memory problems, Erwin realized. The question became if it was a result of physical injury or just the mind suppressing things while trying to cope. "Can you remember where you've been, Eren?" he repeated Hange's first question.

Slowly, Eren held out his hand towards Erwin, who watched in confusion and interest. Then, Eren pointed his finger.

Straight down.

"You were down? Below?" Erwin asked to clarify, getting a nod to affirm it before the hand fell down to Eren's side. "I see. Thank you, Eren. Can you tell me how you got here, in that field?"

"I walked," Eren answered bluntly.

"You... walked?" Levi repeated skeptically. "You just walked without a single Titan eating you?"

Eren raised his head to look at Levi for a moment. Levi gave the kid a wary look as he realized he was being scrutinized. "You look familiar," Eren remarked, out of the blue.

"Kid, trust me, we've never met," Levi stated bluntly.

"No, we haven't," Eren agreed calmly, but something about how he said it made Levi uneasy.

"Eren, was anyone else with you out here?" Erwin refocused the conversation.

Eren looked confused by the question for an instant before shaking his head.

"I see," Erwin said in acceptance. "We have to go and prepare for our departure. Would you be fine with waiting here with Captain Levi while we get ready?" he asked carefully, the child nodding in return. "Thank you, Eren."

Levi normally would have made a comment about being put on babysitting duty, but chose to keep his mouth shut. Someone had to keep an eye on the kid.

It didn't take long for Erwin to relay the orders to prepare for their high-immediate departure back to Trost District. "So, what do you make of him?" Erwin asked to Hange and Miche.

"I don't know," Miche admitted with a scowl. "I don't know what it is, but that kid's smell is just wrong."

"Hm? I didn't smell anything, even if he looks like he needs a bath," Hange stated curiously.

"That's the point. I don't smell anything disgusting on him, just..." he trailed off, casting a weary look at the tent.

"What is it, Miche?" Erwin prompted.

"Like fresh ashes, like sulfur almost," Miche answered with a grimace.

"A fire?" Hange speculated.

"And you, Hange?" Erwin asked with a raised eyebrow.

"He said he was had been " *down* " somewhere," Hange repeated, cupping her chin. "At first I thought he meant the Underground City, but he might have meant a basement."

"I was thinking the same thing. He may have interpreted " *out here* " as outside in general rather than outside Wall Rose," Erwin remarked thoughtfully. "There were always rumor of a few people who always worried about the walls being breached, and stockpiled their own basements in hopes of surviving in their own homes."

"Surviving for five years like that is improbable, but not impossible," Hange admitted reluctantly.

"But a child? He must have been six when the walls fell, more or less," Miche pointed out with a furrowed brow.

"I've seen parents train their children to extremes in the name of their survival," Erwin stated grimly.

"And if there was a fire, that would explain why he's here now," Hange speculated. "If his shelter burned down in the night... and he walked through the dark without stopping... it's not strictly impossible for him to have avoided the Titans," Hange rationalized, but even she was skeptical to believe that theory. "We would just have to assume that the two Titans noticed us before they saw Eren."

"That would nearly explain everything rather neatly," Erwin remarked, and both of them knew he wasn't convinced that was all there was to the story.

But it was a viable enough explanation if they had to try and explain Eren to anyone once they returned.

"Though you didn't answer my question, Hange," Erwin countered curiously. "What do you think of Eren Yeager?"

Hange sighed, crossing her arms. "Regardless of his true story, I think he's ultimately a poor boy that's grown numb to whatever horror and danger he's had to face."

"And I agree," Erwin admitted with a nod. "We obviously have to take him back immediately. Be it five years or a single day, that boy has

gone through more than anyone his age can be asked to. And having a child among the group while in enemy territory could complicate things."

"I just hope there's something left for him to go back to. A family, a cousin, even just an old friend," Hange said with a sigh. "Erwin, please talk me out of adopting him if he turns out to be an orphan."

"No promises, Hange," Erwin stated with a touch of fondness before turning serious. "I'm leaving him in your care. We can't be certain the extent of his trauma, but we know he seems to trust you."

"I don't know, Commander, you were the one he talked to the most," Hange countered with a chuckle. "Perhaps you should watch him."

Before either of them could continue talking, they were interrupted by Levi storming out of the tent with a nasty look about his face as he marched by them. "Levi? Levi, what's wrong?" Erwin asked as Humanity's Strongest went over to an old wooden barrel and proceeded to kick it so hard that his foot went through it. "Levi!"

"What the hell?" Eld said in alarm, the noise catching their attention. Actually, it was catching everyone's attention.

"Captain, what's wrong?!" Petra called over as the man continued to kick and destroy the barrel.

"Hey, um, Captain? You keep doing that, you're going to stab your leg on the wood!" Olou pointed out carefully.

Levi seethed but stopped his assault all the same. Not that there was much left at that point. "Damn. I was hoping that hurt a bit more."

"Levi, what was that about?" Erwin demanded, both stern and concerned.

Meanwhile, Hange had hurried back to the tent, wondering just what had happened to set the man off like that. She blinked in surprise

when she looked inside.

Levi sighed, refusing to look at the Commander. "I hate ration bars," Levi remarked.

"Levi?" Erwin asked, studying the soldier.

"I can stomach them fine. I know what it's like to starve, to feel your body eating itself alive. All the same, I hate ration bars. Nobody really likes them," Levi remarked, looking troubled. "So, what has that kid had to eat to get that kind of reaction...?"

Hange sat down next to Eren, cautiously putting a comforting arm around his shoulder as he greedily ate at the ration bar from beneath his scarf, tears of joy running down his face.

Erwin said nothing at Levi's explanation, understanding what Levi was getting at, but felt there was more to come. "I had a sick thought in my head, Erwin," Levi remarked with a scowl. "Did we do this?"

"What do you mean?" Erwin asked with a scowl.

"The so-called reclaiming attempt after Maria fell, where we sent so much of humanity to die. Did they send a kid out there to die too?" Levi asked in disgust.

"No, they didn't," Erwin answered, firm and certain. "They would have only sent the adults. Sending children would have been too controversial, even for the royal government. Sacrificing the next generation like that could have tipped people into rioting instead of accepting the situation. And Eren would have been less than eight back then."

"I know," Levi admitted tersely. "It just really pissed me off how much I could see it happening for a moment; see them trying to send little kids like that if they could get away with it."

Erwin allowed himself a small smile. Levi had a soft spot for brats. Or, rather, he had a hard-spot for anyone that abused children.

"Brat needs a bath though. He looks like a living shit-stain."

Almost as much as he did for anything remotely unclean.

"That better now?" Hange asked softly, smiling as she rubbed Eren's back. The boy just nodded, drying his tears.

She had a million questions she wanted to ask him, about what he seen and how he survived. But even she wasn't that tactless, not to a child like this.

"Hey, Eren? You know who we are?" Hange asked curiously.

Eren looked to her, his eyes moving down to the symbol on her arm, then nodding back up at her. "The Scouts," he answered, rubbing his forehead. "The ones that go beyond the walls. Or, you used to."

Hange chuckled. "I suppose that's a rather good way of putting it," she agreed. "We're going back to Wall Rose. You'll be safe from the Titans back there," she promised, before stiffening as she caught the dark look over his face, glaring at her. "Eren? What is it?"

Wordlessly, he pointed to the south.

Hange grimaced. "Right, we were hardly safe back then. And I agree. Fine, I'll correct myself: Safer, than out here."

Eren hummed at the distinction, but his eyes stopped glaring, so she took that as a win. "Eren? Can I ask you something?" she said, getting a confused look from him. She supposed she had been asking him a lot of questions, so asking permission was rather redundant now. "Where were you going?"

Eren stared at a moment before sitting straight up, giving her an uncomprehending look.

"You were walking in the field. Where were you going?" she asked gently.

Eren didn't answer at first, and instead elected to point again.

This time, to the north, maybe northwest.

"So, you were heading for Wall Rose," Hange noted curiously.

"You're lucky we found you, you know?"

Eren didn't answer that, not even a hum. He just stared at the floor.

"Well, don't worry. We'll get you the rest of the way there," Hange assured, patting him on the back. "Now, you mind coming with me? We got a bit of a ride ahead and we need to find you a spot."

Eren nodded, following after her. It was rather obvious that every Scout was stealing glances at him whenever they could. And Hange couldn't rightfully blame them. As disciplined as the Scout Regiment was, this was not something any of them had dealt with before; a child out here, alone amongst Titans, somehow alive.

They had transported precious cargo before, but it was a first when they could say they were returning with someone they hadn't set out with.

Levi watched the pair as Hange tried to find a cart with enough empty room for Eren to ride in. Levi was just glad the kid wasn't crying to ride with Hange or something. Two people riding a horse in Titan country was ill-advised, but manageable. But if they ran into Titans, Hange couldn't fight and leave a brat alone on the horse.

"Amazing isn't it, finding a kid out here?" Gunther stated. "I think that's the most inspiring thing I've seen in five years."

"How long could he have been out here, really?" Eld questioned skeptically. "Without gear and training, no one survives out here."

"Well, he is a little brat," Olou remarked coolly. "Perhaps he had some little tunnels so the Titans couldn't follow him?"

"You sound too much like Hange," Levi commented, scowling thoughtfully. "Where's Petra?"

"Here, Captain. I was double checking my tanks," Petra said as she approached, her face a touch green.

"What happened to you? Four Eyes didn't feed you anything weird, did she?" Levi asked levelly, wondering if he had to count Petra as sick for the rest of the mission. The Titans were bad enough; an expedition was a terrible time to catch any disease.

"No, no, I just... suddenly gained a new appreciation for your issues with cleanliness," Petra answered with a shiver, getting weird looks from the men of the group. "I found a dead rat in one of the alleys."

"That's it?" Olou asked, amused and mock-disappointed.

"Knock it off, it's not like that. The head was bitten off," Petra explained.

"Just the head?" Levi asked in surprise.

"Probably just a cat we scared off in the middle of a meal," Eld said without care.

"I know, I know. It was just really disgusting to look at, alright," Petra explained. "I just ate a ration bar, so that didn't help."

"You have my sympathy," Levi said, and it sounded surprisingly genuine. "Come on, Erwin is about to have us set out."

Meanwhile, Hange helped Eren climb into a wagon full of gas tanks, with enough room for him to sit near the front. "There you go. It's not exactly comfy, but please bear with it for now," Hange requested gently.

Eren nodded absently, not looking at her. "Can I have more food?" he asked simply.

Hange nodded. Moblit would probably have a fit over her giving up her food, as he tried to make sure she ate enough as it was, but this was one of those moments where he'd have to deal with her ignoring his advice.

Eren chewed on the bar beneath his scarf. "Huh, so that's why," Eren murmured to himself randomly.

"Eh? You say something, Eren?" Hange asked curiously, leaning on the side of the wagon.

"I just remembered why Levi seems familiar. He looks a lot like someone I knew," Eren answered thoughtfully. "I don't think I've seen her in a long time though."

"Her? Who?" Hange asked curiously.

Eren shrugged as if it wasn't important, readjusting his scarf. "Just someone I knew."

End of Chapter

And there we go. This story swings a lot between creepy and sweet with Eren and the scouts. Still, they got some vague answers and hints as to where Eren has been, and everyone is of the general mind of "get this traumatized child back to safety now dammit!" which is adorable in its own way. Though, yeah, Eren cried tears of joy over a ration bar. Implications were grim enough to piss Levi off. Got to love how hurt kids can bring out the humanity even in the biggest(smallest) of badasses.

I'm sure you're all dying to see what has happened with Mikasa, Carla, Hange, and Armin in the past five years, living with Eren being dead. I will eventually get to showing some of them, but for now, we're on Eren and the scouts.

I did not intend for Hange to be this precious with Eren, but I love it.

Until next time, Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays!

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Trusted with a Name

Hell Overfloweth

Disclaimer: I do not own AoT

Eren sat in the wagon, ignoring almost anything and everything else in the world with his head tilted back as he stared up at the blue sky, watching the puffy white clouds drift by as the wind blew by him. The ration bar was long gone, chewed up and sitting in his stomach.

Hange was out of formation, technically, but it was necessary. She rode near the wagon that Eren was in, occasionally glancing at the mysterious child. So many questions and concerns were in her head. She wasn't exactly the motherly type, or so she heard, but this child was her responsibility for the time being. There could... **should** be a hundred and ten things wrong with someone like him, but all of his main problems so far seemed to be in the mental realms of head and in the metaphorical ones of the heart.

She shook her head, glancing back ahead to the wall, Rose. They would be entering the town of Trost soon. It looked to be about twenty-five kilometers, so it would be at least twenty more minutes before they got there. The home stretch as it was.

The average person would feel happy. The casualty rate wasn't even in the double digits this time, they got their mission done and they actually found a child that miraculously survived beyond the wall!

That was just it though. That was too much success, too much good news. All her time in the Scouts and as a scientist taught her that when all variables were in or against your favor, it could not be by chance. Usually it was against them: the government wanting to cut their funding or disband them all together, the people seeing them as a waste of taxes, the best new soldiers choosing the safety of the

military police over aiding humanity on the front lines. The system was rigged against them in many ways.

But how does a mission outside the wall get rigged in their favor? Short of believing in a god, that seemed beyond the ability for humans to meddle with in this manner. And how did Eren fit into all of this?

The key question, she supposed, was why hadn't they ran into as many Titans as normal? Even with the Commander's formation used to avoid Titans, this went beyond its effectiveness rate.

The only logical explanation for her was that something had attracted them elsewhere... which... set grim implications in her head. If there had been a band of underground survivors out there and they ran out of food or their shelter burned down and they had been forced to flee... that could cause a gathering of Titans. It was somewhat unlikely they attracted so many to make this difference, but it was possible.

The variable to make that more possible were unsettling. A bigger group, who had moved through the night, then found themselves overcome by Titans at dawn; and left Eren the only survivor.

Hange almost felt sick at the idea of that thought, that their survival and success was the byproduct of the Titans finishing off a possible holdout of humanity behind their lines. If that was true, she wondered how many were those that stayed when the wall fell and how many were part of the "attempt" to reclaim Wall Maria.

Hange hated not knowing all she could, not being able to ask questions and not being able to narrow the possible answers. But she knew that all her normal lust for knowledge would accomplish was probably distressing Eren, maybe even alienating him if she pushed too hard.

She almost sighed. Why did she have to be the one to pick him up? Petra would probably be a better fit for this. Or maybe Olou! As

much as the man tried to imitate Levi, she did recall that he had many younger siblings. He had to know how to handle children. That was an art, not a science! More so with a child like Eren, whose mental state had to be some place between fragile and broken.

Still, he was a tough kid. Regardless of his history, the fact he got that far had to mean something about his resolve.

Her mind clicked back to reality as the wall started to loom, a thought coming to her mind. She quickly removed her cloak as they slowed while the gates opened. "Hoi, Eren! Cover up in this and lay down. People might stare, okay?" she requested softly.

She doubted the commander want to explain to anyone just yet about Eren. Because it might look like they took a small child **into** Titan territory rather than having retrieved him. And for once, she couldn't blame people for thinking such; it was what she would assume as the most likely explanation to the unrealistic story of finding a child amongst the human-eating giants.

Still, Eren didn't need that kind of attention right now.

Eren looked between her and the cloak a few times before taking it. He wrapped it all around himself, the Wings of Freedom obviously too big for his small frame. She had to admit, it was rather adorable as he snuggled up into it, laying down in the wagon.

"You know they won't keep quiet long," Levi remarked to Erwin, joining him as they began to enter Trost. The civilians watched on, pleasantly surprised by the relatively small amount of dead scouts.

Levi swore he heard someone joke about how it looked like there were more scouts returning than when they left.

"I wouldn't expect them to. Strange as it is, it's the kind of hopeful tale people long for in times like this," Erwin acknowledged stoically. "I'll have to report his existence to the higher ups. But that should give us a few days, likely a week or more to figure out what state he

really is in. Hopefully get some more detailed answers to explain the situation. By then, if there is any luck left in this world, Eren will be on his way to a new home."

Levi hummed. "And if he doesn't have any? Kid like that either won't last long on the streets or... the streets won't last long with him," Levi said heavily.

Erwin wisely didn't pry into Levi's past and whatever made him feel similar to this boy. "The average family... wouldn't know how to handle a child that has gone through as much as we believe he has," Erwin concluded. "We'll cross that bridge when we come to it."

Levi noted the use of when, not if. So, he and Erwin were of the same mind; Eren probably didn't have any family left within the walls.

Without much to interrupt them, the Scout regiment made it through Trost, heading for their current headquarters just a few kilometers northeast of Trost.

Hange let out a small breath as they began to head to the countryside. "Okay, you can come out no-" she started, looking just in time to see Eren not only uncovered, but jumping out over the edge of the wagon. "Wha!? Wait, Eren!" she called, the Scouts giving her odd looks as she steered her horse off to the side of the path before jumping off to run to Eren before he could get away. Not that he was trying to, walking at a relaxed pace towards a large tree. She quickly grabbed the boy and turned him around. "Eren, where are you going?"

He gave her a somewhat confused look before pointing off to the side.

"Eh?! Were you trying to head back outside the walls!?" Hange asked in alarm. She heard about people living in the wild, finding themselves unable to handle living in the more cramped spaces of the towns and cities, but this was-!

"There," Eren corrected blankly, pointing downward a bit to be clear.

Hange blinked, realizing he was actually pointing at the tree. "Why would...?" she stopped, looking at him again. To be precise, how his hands were holding onto the waistline of his pants. Awkward realization dawned. "You have to use the bathroom," she stated blankly.

Eren just nodded.

"Do you have to take a shit?" Hange asked, dreading another nod. Levi would have her head if Eren sat on anything without a bath after something like that.

Eren shook his head.

Hange was tempted to thank the walls, but gave a nervous smile at Eren's impatient stare. "You're going to pee on me if I don't let you go right now, aren't you?"

Eren nodded curtly

Hange promptly removed her hands as quick as possible. "Fine, fine, do your business," she said, waving him towards the tree.

Hange was acutely aware of all the Scouts from the tail end of the group giving her stranger than normal looks as she stood patiently in front of the tree, waiting on the ten year old to finish peeing behind it. If she was anyone else, she might be self-conscious about it. Instead, she just hummed patiently as she heard biology do its wonders in expelling waste from the body.

Hange looked up thoughtfully. "We're going to need new clothes. Levi is going to hyperventilate just thinking about how long it has been since Eren's clothes been properly cleaned," she murmured to herself. She glanced back over her left shoulder at the tree when she heard the waterworks had finished. "All done?... Eren? Ello?" she

called, grimacing as she prepared to check if needed. "Please tell me you didn't run off?"

"I'm right here."

Hange nearly fell over, seeing Eren had come around from the other side of the tree, staring up at her stoically behind his scarf. "You're a sneaky one, eh?" she asked with a fond headshake and a small smile, taking Eren's hand and leading him back to her horse.

A silence grew over them as they made their way after the Scouts, Hange noting that Eren indeed smelled mostly only of ash and smoke. She frowned, taking note of his breathing. It was steady and clear as best she could tell, with it being obvious she was checking. Still, she was a bit worried that smoke inhalation might have been the cause of some of his problems. She had never seen the effects herself, but she knew it could affect the mind and cause headaches from oxygen deprivation, and could be the reason his skin was pale if not just from hiding inside for years. Still, it seemed strange that none of the more obvious and immediate side effects were present, like coughing or trouble breathing.

"Eren?" Hange spoke up, feeling him lean towards her in acknowledgement. "You tell me if anything feels painful or even funny, okay?"

"I'm fine," he said again, but seemed to feel her unsatisfied expression even without seeing it. "... Okay."

"Thank you," Hange said with a smile, patting him on the head.

The rest of the ride went by in a more comfortable silence.

By the time they caught up, the Scouts were already heading into the headquarters. "Welcome to Castle Myrk, Eren," Hange introduced to the boy.

Eren looked up only minutely. It was an old, small castle. Complete with a forest to practice with their maneuver gear and a field on the other side to ride the horses, with a small village on other end of the stretch of grass.

And Hange was in no way surprised to see Erwin and Levi waiting for her at the gate, giving her odd looks. "What's the hold up? Did you almost lose him already?" Levi asked evenly.

"I didn't want to piss in the wagon," Eren answered bluntly.

Hange chuckled as both men looked surprised by that rather sudden and unexpected explanation.

"I see. Well, as long as there was no trouble then," Erwin accepted.

"Thank you," Levi said with a sigh of relief.

"You're welc-" Hange started, only to be mercilessly interrupted.

"I meant the brat, not you, Four Eyes," Levi corrected before stalking off.

"Humanity's strongest, at his finest," Hange remarked with an amused headshake.

"Should I pee on him?" Eren asked honestly.

"No," Erwin answered abruptly, his great eyebrow twitching at the madwoman getting a gleam in spectacled eyes. "Hange, no, whatever it is, no."

"Oh, I wasn't thinking about annnnnything at all, Commander Erwin~" Hange said with a creepy giggle.

Eren glanced back at her for a moment before looking to Erwin with a completely serious look. "She is not a good liar."

"No, no she is not," Erwin agreed. "You'll be staying here with us for now, Eren, until we can find a place for you."

Eren looked up at the castle again, as if judging if it was worth staying in. If he found a problem with it, he didn't say anything as he lowered his gaze again.

"If you're feeling up to it, I'd like to ask you more questions later," Erwin stated encouragingly.

Eren nodded in acceptance.

Erwin turned his attention to Hange again. "Try and get him settled. There should be a spare room for him."

Hange nodded, leaving with Eren to put her horse in the stable.

Erwin took a breath before heading to his office, ignoring the looks being given to him and Hange. He had reports to file, letters to write for the families of dead soldiers and suspicions to verify or rule out.

And he had to figure out what to say to the rest of the Scouts about Eren soon. But he felt the need to get as many facts about Eren as possible before he did that.

It was one thing if a leader lied intentional. It was worse if they had just been wrong about the information.

Levi watched the entire exchange from a distance with his squad.

"So, do we have a gag order, Captain?" Eld questioned curiously.

"Officially, no," Levi admitted, glancing back at the four over his shoulder. "But it might best to not say anything until tomorrow."

"Sir, we found a kid in Titan territory," Gunther remarked with a bead of sweat. "People aren't just going to ignore that. Everyone is just in shock, hoping that someone will explain soon."

"And the commander will offer one soon," Levi remarked coolly. "Just... let the brat have a peaceful night before we get everyone demanding to know his entire damn life story."

That silenced most of their questions... except one. "Captain," Petra started hesitantly. "Does this make any sense to you?"

"Not one fucking bit," Levi admitted without missing a beat. "But I know that kid has been through hell. Anyone with two brain cells can tell that by the look in his eyes."

"You all heard him," Olou remarked in an effort to copy his captain, before grinning a bit. "Today, we'll be happy for this one in a million miracle; tomorrow we can be cynically suspicious of everything."

Everyone agreed, even if they weren't willing to admit it.

In no small part to the grim mortality rate of the Survey Corp, finding a decent room for Eren wasn't hard. There were two bunk beds, all unoccupied now, which was good in Hange's opinion. They could move him to the other bed after giving him a proper clean up, and then clean the previous sheets, thus satisfying Levi's obsession. Hange, recalling Eren's reaction to a ration bar, decided to take it upon herself to bring Eren a proper meal. Sure, it was just soup, bread, and water but it was still much, much better than ration bars.

She was pleasantly surprised that no one was snooping around the door to Eren's room yet. Careful not to spill the food off the wooden tray, she carefully opened the door and pushed it open with her rear. "Hoi, Eren, I brought you som-" she stopped, blinking at the vacant room. More importantly, the very undisturbed beds. She calmly stepped back and glanced down the right to the end of the hall and counted the doors. She quickly determined that, yes, this was indeed the same room she left him in. Quizzically, she looked back in the room. "Eren?"

She heard something stir and sighed softly. Without another word, she closed the door and headed over to the bed on the right. She

bent over to put the tray on the floor, leaning down the rest of the way to glance under the bed.

She smiled softly at the form under the bed, very sure that the green eyes were staring intently at her. "Hey, Eren, I brought you some food," she informed with a small chuckle. "I'd push it under, but there isn't enough room for you to eat under there."

He didn't move.

Hange sat down before leaning against the bed and waited. She wasn't sure what she was waiting for exactly, but it became very clear that it wouldn't happen on its own. "You know, Eren? I'm not going to lie to you," she said consolingly. "You're safe in here from the Titans. But I won't tell you there is nothing to be afraid of. There are plenty of things to be scared of even without them. So, it's okay if you want to hide. I just... hope you know, you don't have to be scared of me."

The silence returned for another ten seconds before two hands grabbed the bottom of the bed and Eren pulled himself out with ease, turning around to sit next to Hange. Hange frowned for a moment; something about how Eren pulled himself out like that was a bit off-putting. It was too practiced, like he had pulled himself out from similar positions a thousand times.

With that, he pulled the tray over to himself and started to eat, almost drowning the bread in the soup before shoving it under his scarf.

This went on for a few bites before Eren finally spoke. "I'm not scared."

"Hmm?" Hange looked to him curiously, hoping he'd elaborated.

"I don't hide because I'm scared," Eren said with an annoyed tone to him. "I hide because I want to rest."

Hange didn't comment on that as she deciphered the meaning of that little tidbit. It was an interesting distinction to make, hiding out of necessity instead of fear. "You know, it'd be a lot less messy if you-" Hange started with a small smile, reaching out to his scarf.

That was a mistake.

Bread was crushed in his hands, his entire body tensed up horribly and no child should have a glare that murderous. "Okay, okay, I'm sorry," Hange said quickly, holding up her hands placatingly. She saw him relax, but still watch her warily. "I wasn't trying to take it, just... pull it down some?" she explained, growing a bit worried. Was there something wrong with his face? Was he afraid to let them see it?

Eren stared for a moment longer before, rather gruffly, pulling the scarf down to reveal his face. As if he had made some point only he knew, Eren turned back to the tray, picking the soup and taking a long sip of it, forgoing the utensils. Hange rose an eyebrow, finding nothing wrong with the lower half of his face, except that it was a shade paler.

Which meant covering it with the scarf wasn't about his face.

"Did someone important to you give you that scarf?" Hange asked cautiously.

Eren shook his head as he swallowed another mouthful. "I gave one to her."

"Eh? I don't understand," Hange stated with a pinched brow.

"I gave my scarf to someone. She was cold. So I got a new one to help me remember her," Eren explained with a scowl. "Hers is red though."

"I don't know, black does look good on you," Hange teased, light and careful, but it got little reaction. This was important information

though, maybe even someone that was still alive. "Can you tell me her name?"

Eren stopped, and Hange almost thought he had forgotten the name. Then he looked at her with narrowed, searching eyes.

Hange understood with a slight start. Eren was debating if he trusted her with knowing this. It seemed... rather strange, Eren being so untrustworthy with a name yet seemed to trust her with his life to some extent.

Finally, Eren looked away to the floor, rubbing his head with a sad and lost gaze about his eyes.

"Her name is Mikasa."

End of Chapter

And there we go. An obviously more sweet than creepy chapter. Savor them, I make no promises on how long that'll last. But yeah, they have finally returned and already hijinks are ensuing, people are curious about Eren, and Eren's past has ever grimmer implications.

Hope you all enjoyed this and you are getting through this first month well.

Until next time!

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Of Soap and a Scarf

Hell Overfloweth

Disclaimer: I do not own AoT

"Ahh, Hange, Eren, glad you could make it," Erwin greeted, sitting behind his desk with the pale moon shining in. He didn't even raise an eyebrow at the new stains on Eren's scarf. "I hope you enjoyed the meal."

Eren just nodded in confirmation before sitting on the couch, Hange taking up a seat next to him.

The commander glanced to Hange, but she just gave a negative headshake. She had nothing to report at the moment, or nothing that couldn't wait. "Now, Eren, I know you've been through a lot, but I was hoping you could answer some more questions for me. People are... confused and I don't want to make them think either of us is lying by misunderstanding. And I'd appreciate if you can answer me with words as much as possible."

Eren stared at him for a moment before answering. "Okay?"

Erwin got the impression Eren was waiting for the questions, and thus continued. "For starters, do you know how long you were out there?" he asked curiously.

"Since That Day," Eren answered with a plain, empty voice.

"Since Wall Maria fell and the Titans made it inside?" Erwin clarified, getting a nod. "Do you know how many other people were with you?"

Eren looked to the floor, clutching the side of his head. "Too many," he breathed out, his shoulders slumping at something only he could see. "Not enough."

Erwin paused, giving Eren a moment. While unclear, it spoke enough to Erwin; Too many for Eren to count, not enough to make a difference.

"Did anyone else make it out with you?" Erwin asked, hoping the bluntness would make the pain pass quicker.

Eren didn't answer, but didn't look sad either. He just looked lost, turning his gaze upward. "I don't know. I... don't think so?"

The same answer as before. Erwin didn't expect anything different, but felt he had to be sure. "Where were you staying?"

"Down," Eren answered simply.

"Yes, but where, Eren?" Hange asked encouraging. "Was it a basement?"

They both grew curious by the silence. "There were caves, and tunnels. They were deep."

"A mine," Erwin deduced. Eren didn't confirm or deny it, but Hange and Erwin shared a look. A mine, especially a coal mine would explain a lot. Most Titans would never fit inside one. By luck, none of the smallest Titans might have made it there for years. Or perhaps the entrances were sealed properly until a mistake was made. But were there any such mines like that in the southern area of Maria? "Eren, I'm sorry to ask further, but can you tell me what happened?"

"Some of it," Eren answered, rubbing his head again and closing his eyes. "There were monsters in there. We tried to get rid of them. It was hot. Really hot. We fought so hard, so long. They tried to keep them away from me, so I could get... somewhere. Then it got cold. I thought we were winning. I think someone pushed me. Up? Out? I don't know, but everything got so loud and so hot again. Then I..."

"Eren?" Hange called gently, leaning down to see him crying softly.

"Then I saw the sky," he answered with a broken voice. "I... I couldn't remember what it looked like."

"Oh, Eren," Hange said, bringing her arms around him in an attempt to comfort.

Erwin bowed his head for a moment. "You don't have to say-"

"I just kept walking," Eren interrupted, shaking softly in Hange's embrace. "I just kept walking. Then you found me. Then I'm here."

There was a brief silence.

"And... none of the monsters attacked you?" Erwin asked hesitantly.

"They were too busy with everyone else," Eren answered in a distant voice.

Hange and Erwin shared subtle grimaces at that. How many times had they had to use a dead or dying comrade as a distraction for themselves and others to survive? It was a reality they learned to live with and accept.

It wasn't something a child should be forced to cope with.

Erwin took a breath, waiting for Eren to calm down as Hange rubbed the boy's back. "Eren, I know this might be difficult, but do you have any family that might have made it to Wall Rose five years ago?"

To their surprise, the boy nodded. "You tell him," he muttered to Hange.

"Huh? Oh, right," Hange said, turned to the commander. "Eren mentioned someone important to him. Someone named... Mikasa?" she said, hoping she recalled the pronunciation correctly. By Eren's nod, she had.

"Mikasa?" Erwin repeated in interest.

"That's the name I got from him, yes," Hange answered.

"Not a usual name, by the sounds of it," Erwin remarked with a scowl as Hange gained a thoughtful look.

It did not sound like most names within the walls, like it was foreign; which was obviously and increasingly rare after a hundred years of humanity living within the walls.

However, she noted that Erwin's mind was already elsewhere. "Does that name mean something to you, Commander?" Hange asked curiously.

"Not distinctly, no. I'm almost certain it is a name I've heard or read in the past, but the context eludes me for now," he remarked thoughtfully before shaking his head. With that, he stood up from his desk, walking to be in front of Eren before crouching down to his level. "I will find her and your family if I can, Eren," Erwin assured without trying to give false hope.

Eren's eyes widened for a moment before settling. It seemed he didn't want to give himself false hope either. "Thank you."

A pleasant moment washed over the three, Hange ruffling Eren's hair some.

"Now, there's just one last matter to take care of," Erwin remarked with some amusement. "Eren, when was the last time you had a bath?"

The long stare Erwin received was answer enough.

"How do you not stink worse than this?" Hange asked with a scowl, looking at the obviously filthy clothes that somehow did NOT smell like a burning pile of garbage.

"Captain Levi took the liberty of preparing a bath after I requested some of our more sewing-inclined individuals make some makeshift

clothes for Eren," Erwin explained.

"Commander Erwin getting soldiers to knit children clothes," Hange remarked with a chuckle. "I bet that was a rather surreal moment for them."

"It was not how I expected this expedition to end either," Erwin mused with some levity. "Hange, Levi should be waiting outside by now. Please accompany him and Eren to ensure nothing goes wrong."

Hange gained a confused look and Eren tilted his head. "What can go wrong with a bath?" Hange questioned.

"Call it a feeling," Erwin said mysteriously.

Hange shrugged before standing to leave, taking Eren's hand in hers. She wasn't sure what the commander was on about. Eren was a traumatized child, definitely, but not an unreasonable one.

Five Minutes Later

"I'm telling you, this is a bad idea," Hange stated pointedly.

"This isn't a debate," Levi said bluntly.

They were in a room with a wooden bathtub filled with water, Eren off to one side with a blank expression.

"Do I need to remind you that our rank and height differences are proportionate?"

"That rag is fucking filthy," Levi pointed out with distaste. "Who knows what kind of infestations are in it. It's more of a health hazard to himself than us anyway."

"And he will probably bite your fingers off if you try. And I am ***not*** explaining to Commander Erwin how Humanity's Strongest Soldier

lost his trigger fingers over a scarf!" Hange retorted, making an x-motion with her arms.

"Then help me get the rag off," Levi countered flatly.

"Yeah, no. He kind of likes me right now and I am not losing my science fingers over this," Hange stated firmly, backing away from the tub to watch the show unfold.

Levi rolled his eyes before turning to the kid in question, Eren meeting his gaze as he did. "Look brat, I get that you're attached to that thing, but it's disgusting beyond all salvaging. And you need a bath," Levi stated firmly, walking over to reach down to Eren.

Levi's eyes widened minutely as he saw Eren's dilate like a wild animal's.

He barely moved his hand up in time to avoid Eren grabbing one of his fingers, the small hand grasping the soldier's palm with a death grip.

For a moment, Levi and Eren just stared intently at one another. "That's one hell of a grip, brat," Levi remarked cautiously, feeling the nails getting close to breaking skin. "But I'm going to need that hand back," he ordered sternly.

Eren stared, his eyes still wild yet searching now. Slowly, he released Levi's hand and the captain steadily brought the hand back to his side.

Hange sighed in resignation, leaning against the wall. "Well, here we go."

Levi's other hand snapped forth, trying to yank the scarf off in an instant.

Eren's eyes shot wide before turning wrathful, leaping up to try and literally bite Levi's arm through the sleeve of the shirt.

"Oh, fuck! You damn brat!" Levi cursed through gritted teeth as he managed to pry Eren off. "Oh, if you were three years older, I'd kick the shit out of you for that."

Eren spat out the taste of Levi's shirt before reaffixing his scarf, all but growling at Levi.

"Don't try it, you won't like how it ends," Levi warned.

Unphased, Eren charged Levi.

Hange nearly busted out laughing at the scene that followed.

Levi was calmly balanced on one leg, his other foot raised and pressed against Eren's head to keep the rapid child from getting any closer.

"See, I told you," Levi stated stoically, Eren stopping his stalled advance to glare up at the Captain. "Yeah, what are you going to do n-" Levi started, stepping back as Eren slipped past his boot and sprang forth to punch him.

In the balls.

"Did you just try to-?!" Levi started, only for Eren to try it again. "Knock it off!"

"Hahaha, I think that's precisely his intent!" Hange laughed from the side, watching Levi leap back from attacks that were potentially fatal to his sperm count.

"Not helping, Four-Eyes! Help me before I accidentally hurt the kid!" Levi called with gritted teeth.

Could he put a stop to this? Yes! But he might really injure Eren at this point with how much of a fight the kid was putting up.

"Why do you assume I can help? I haven't provoked him when he gives me a warning look," Hange pointed out.

"Then consider it an experiment- and why do you keep aiming for my nuts?!" Levi yelled in frustration. It was starting to get embarrassing, how much effort he was putting in to avoid getting attacked in the groin by a child.

"Have you tried picking him up or are you too short to try that?" Hange teased with a snicker.

"He **bit** me, Hange!" Levi reminded, jumping to the other side of the wooden tub.

Hange just shook her head in amusement as the two circled the tub, staring each other down. If Levi was using her name, she should probably lend a hand. "Okay, Eren, how about we calm down and- Oh Shit!" Hange yelled in surprise as Eren picked up a small stool and hurled it at Levi.

The Survey Captain dodged with ease, the piece of furniture shattering into many broken pieces on impact with the wall, leaving a notable dent in it. Levi took note of that before giving Eren a renewed look of annoyance. "And you're trying to take shots below the belt with *that* kind of muscle?" he asked with an angry tsk, very grateful he didn't risk doing anything that might let the kid land a blow.

Eren just glared, breathing hard as his hands clutched into fists hard.

So hard that they bled.

That froze both adults. "E-Eren, it's okay, Levi will stop," Hange said softly, slowly moving into his peripheral as she moved closer. "Just calm down, alright? He won't try to take it, okay?"

But Eren didn't calm down. If anything, he tensed up more as his arms encircled himself.

Levi just stared with a troubled look. "Kid, I-"

That was when the door opened and Eren promptly booked it out.

"Wait, Eren! Stop him!" Hange called as Eren dived between Petra's legs-

And blinked as he was promptly scooped up around the waist and held under Olou's arm.

"Hey, hey, what's all this about?" Olou asked, holding towels under his other arm, the bewildered Petra holding a bundle of clothes.

"I take it things didn't go well?" Petra asked nervously, seeing a very on edge Levi and a broken footstool.

"He wants to burn my scarf," Eren answered spitefully.

"Not like we couldn't get you a new one, Brat," Levi pointed out.

Eren gave the perfectly reasonable response of hissing at Levi while grasping his scarf with his bloodied hands.

Olou took one look at the situation and shook his head. "Captain, I can't believe I'm saying this, but you're relieved of duty."

"... Huh?" Hange asked, everyone giving Olou strange looks. Except Eren who was still giving Levi death stares.

"Look, with all due respect, you're obviously making this harder than it needs to be," Olou said with a sigh. "Captain, just sit this one out. Let me and the Section commander handle this."

Levi gave his squad member a considering look before marching off. "Fine. Watch out, he takes cheap-shots," he instructed as he left.

Petra looked between Hange and Levi repeatedly before handing the section commander the bundle of clothes and heading after Levi.

Olou sagged as the door closed. "I can't believe I said that!" he exclaimed, relieved and terrified. "I thought for sure Captain Levi would put me on latrine duty forever for that!"

"He still might," Hange remarked with a smirk.

Meanwhile, Levi leaned on the wall down the hall from the room. "Well, I was wondering if he'd ever grow some balls," Levi remarked idly.

"I think that's the first time I've seen him stop imitating you in a while," Petra said in amusement, frowning as Levi rubbed his arm. "Are you okay?"

"Damn brat tried to take a bite out of me," he answered to Petra's alarm. "Don't look like that. In hindsight, I suppose had that coming. Honestly, I'm just glad he didn't manage to hit me in the balls."

"Oh, by the Walls, did he really!?" Petra asked, covering her mouth- and making a very poor effort to hide her laughter.

"It's not funny," Levi remarked coldly.

"It's a little funny," Petra couldn't help saying. "So, do you think Olou is okay?"

Levi shrugged. "He has a bunch of siblings. So I figure he's either a damn master of this or he'll fail horribly from overconfidence; Hopefully Eren gets a good soaking either way."

The two waited for a good twenty minutes, Levi opting to sit down against the wall, before the door finally opened again.

Hange and Olou emerged with their own clothes a tad wet, Eren walking out in the new clothes they had been able to sew and make on short notice; A dark brown shirt with light brown pants, and a new cloak. This one green, like a miniature version of the scouts, but without their emblem on the back.

He was also wearing a towel as a replacement for his scarf and was currently carrying another towel that was bundled up and damp.

Levi studied Olou for a moment, finding no injuries on the man.
"Congrats, you're a brat-whisperer."

"I have to say, I'm rather impressed," Hange admitted with a chuckle, patting the normally boisterous man on the back as he scratched his head awkwardly. "All he had to do was ask Eren to let him scrub the scarf in front of him while Eren took his bath."

Levi raised an eyebrow. "And that rag is where now?"

"Where do you think, Captain?" Olou retorted, looking pointed down at Eren.

Or rather, the bundle in his arms.

"You're joking," Levi deadpanned.

"Just be glad we got him to not wear it until it dries," Hange remarked with a sigh.

"And I double checked, Captain," Olou added in confidently. "The scarf doesn't have any bugs in it or anything. So it's... as clean as it'll get."

"Right," Levi grunted, deciding that might have to be good enough before meeting Eren's gaze. The boy was still eyeing him viciously, his hands wrapped in bandages as he clutched the bundle protectively. This prompted Levi to sigh. "Look, Brat? I'm sorry for trying to take your rag. I have issues with things being clean," he apologized awkwardly. "I won't try to take it anymore, even if you should seriously burn it for a new one."

"I don't think that's helping, Ca-" Petra started, only for everyone to blink as Eren suddenly dropped the bundle in the middle of the floor, abruptly turned around and walked back to the room he just washed in.

"... What was that about?" Levi asked with a scowl.

"I am as lost as the rest of you," Hange admitted curiously as Olou shrugged.

Eren returned in less than a moment, walking directly up to Levi with a calm expression now. Without pause, he held out something for Levi, who raised an eyebrow as he took it. "... This is a bar of soap," Levi observed blankly. "What am I supposed to do with this?"

"You like clean," Eren elaborated with a shrug.

Everyone gaped and bit back their laughter as Eren reached over and patted Levi on the head. With that, the boy turned around and picked up the towel that his scarf was wrapped in, acting as if nothing had happened.

"I'm going to sleep," Eren announced, heading off down the hall.

"I... can't tell if the kid is trying to be nice to me or patronize me," Levi stated with an eyebrow twitch.

Hange cleared her throat as she gained control of herself. "W-well, thank you both for the help, but I got to go make sure Eren gets to the right room."

"And I need to go clean up that room," Olou stated, leaving before his captain could remember to give him latrine duty or something.

"Goodnight, Captain," Petra said, clearly amused as she left Levi alone, staring at the bar of soap.

Soon after, Hange had Eren sitting on his bed and was giving him a rather pointed look. "Okay, Eren, I am **not** saying you should get rid of the scarf," Hange said firmly, eyeing the bundle in his lap. "But you *cannot* sleep with it tonight while it's still wet."

"Okay."

"I get it, it's impo-wait, what?" Hange said in surprise, staring at Eren who gazed back blankly.

"Soggy scarfs aren't good for sleeping," Eren answered simply.

"I... guess that's a good way of putting it," Hange said with a hum. Her eyebrow twitching as Eren lifted the mattress up and put the bundle under the bed. "That... is better than I hoped for, I suppose," she settled, gazing at Eren suspiciously. "I'm going to find you and that scarf under the bed in the morning, right?"

Eren's blank stare somehow became more blank.

"I'll take that as a yes," Hange said in resignation as she pulled down the sheets and tucked Eren into bed. "I'm sorry about Levi. He means well."

Eren didn't say anything to that, so Hange decided not to push it.

"I'm... surprised you wanted me to tell Commander Erwin that girl's name," Hange broached carefully. "You seemed... like you didn't want to tell me earlier."

Eren shrugged. "His eyes were like yours."

Hange didn't know what that meant exactly, but accepted it with a smile. "Well, I hope you sleep well. Good night, Eren," she said, taking one more look around the room, making sure the window was closed. With that, she headed out with a soft hum.

Eren laid there with an listless gaze, the room growing silent save the wind blowing through the open window.

"It is a good night..."

End of Chapter

And here we get more creepy hints at Eren's backstory and an... interesting number of moments between him and Levi. And Levi is... understandably concerned about Eren's scarf which is probably as dirty as Abridged Mikasa's scarf. XP

All joking aside, hope you all enjoyed this. I did not plan on the sheer... wholesomeness of these scenes when I started it, but I love its contrast with the horror aspects floating just beneath the surface.

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Priest and Toilet Paper

Hell Overfloweth

Disclaimer: I do not own AoT

AN Oi, sorry for the long delay. AoT somehow ended twice, I got a new job, and now my whole family has a mild case of covid. Yeah, life's been shitty, but I decided to use this chance to get back to writing, so here we are. Enjoy!

"Hoi! Eren! Rise and shine!" Hange called cheerfully as she entered the room. She all but expected to find the bed empty, but grew concerned as the room remained silent. "Eren?" she called again before checking under the beds. Seeing nothing underneath, she began to grow worried.

She paled at the sight of the open window. She closed that, didn't she? Did Eren open it? Did he...?

Hange had raced over before the thought even finished. Rationally, it was highly unlikely, as someone would have found the body by now. But she wasn't thinking rationally as she scanned the ground three stories below the window.

She let out a breath she didn't know she was holding at the lack of blood and gore to be found. "Oiii, what is this boy doing to me?" she asked in exasperation, massaging her eyes as she stalked out to search the base. "Dammit, Eren. Do you have to wander off like this?" she grumbled, trying to deduce where he might have gone. He couldn't have wandered away from the castle without someone noticing. Or she hoped so at least.

That just left... everywhere in this base that a ten year old could possibly hide in.

Great.

"Four Eyes, what'd you do now?"

She spun around, having been so single-minded and deep in thought that she failed to notice Levi as she passed him. "Nothing! Why would you ask that?" she asked in alarm at the sudden accusation.

"You had the same stupid look when you accidental ruined half a month's worth of food trying to see if your damn pets would eat them," Levi answered pointedly.

Hange began to sweat bullets at his assessment. "I didn't do anything! It's just... Eren's missing!" she answered with a wince.

"So?" Levi asked with a raised eyebrow, as if it wasn't a big deal.

"So? Levi, ignoring that he's in a new place after five years of hell, he's my responsibility for the time being!" Hange reminded sternly.

"Hange, he's ten. No matter how much his mind may or may not be fucked up, he's still a brat. By virtue of being a brat, his ass is going to wander around the place once he gets bored in his room," Levi stated pointedly. "Just ask around, someone's bound to have seen him. We don't exactly have anyone else that short around here."

Hange sighed deeply to calm her nerves... along with resisting the urge to comment on Levi's height. "Yes, you're right, of course. How do people handle being parents with so much to worry about?"

"Most have the luxury of having a smaller IQ that can't imagine everything that'll go wrong," Levi stated, scowling as a thought came to mind. "Hange, you left Eren alone all night?"

"Yes, why? Should I not? He doesn't seem to be scared of being alone," Hange asked, worried she was already failing at this.

"Does that brat even know where to take a dump?" Levi questioned pointedly, eyebrow twitching in dread.

Hange's mouth opened before slowly closing, her eyes wide. "Oh, shit."

"You better hope not. I won't skin the kid, but you're another story, Four Eyes," Levi warned, Hange running off before he even finished speaking.

"Eren! Eren!" Hange called out, searching every floor of the castle, but found no hint of him anywhere; which could just as well be Eren not responding to her calls. If so, that made her mission all the more complicated.

"Hange? What's seems to be the emergency?" Erwin inquired as she skidded to a halt past him.

"Commander! Have you seen Eren?" she asked quickly. "He's missing and I never showed him where the bathroom is!"

Erwin stared at her for a moment, mostly unphased by that unusual explanation. "If I was a member of the Church, I could only hope the Walls have mercy on you, Hange. As I'm not, it has been an honor serving with you," Erwin said, holding back his amused smirk until he walked away

"Eh?! Commander! Commander!" Hange called out in frustration. "You're really going to leave me to Levi's cleanliness wrath?!"

"Apologies, Hange. I deal in suicidal odds, not impossibilities," Erwin called back with a wave.

Hange nearly tore her hair out in frustration before continuing her search. She eventually found herself out in the courtyard, debating how far she could flee before Levi got her.

"Everything alright, Section Commander?"

Hange's eyes lit up in relief and hope at the voice of her assistant. "Moblit!" she exclaimed, grabbing him by the collar to his surprise.

"Thank goodness you're here! The kid, Eren? Have you seen him anywhere?! He's missing!"

"Eren? Umm, yeah, I've seen him," Moblit answered awkwardly, pointing off to the side. "He's right there."

Moblit swore he heard a crack as Hange's head snapped to her left, the madwoman blinking at the sight. "Eh?!" she exclaimed in disbelief. Eren was sitting on a barrel, watching two off-duty scouts playing a card game. "Eren!" she yelled, almost knocking Moblit over as she ran over to the ten year old.

Eren hummed, looking over at the approaching woman as if he hadn't vanished on her. "Hange," he greeted with a nod.

"Eren, where the heck have you been?" she asked, trying to summon every scolding bone in her body.

It didn't faze him. "I got up to watch the sun get up," he answered, pointing to the battlements on top of the walls surrounding the base.

"The sunrise?" Hange repeated in surprise.

"Yeah, you should have seen it, Section Commander," one of the players said with a small smile. "Poor kid was bawling up there. Like it was his first time seeing it."

"Felt like it too," Eren commented, making Hange wince and the soldiers interested. Thankfully, they didn't try to pry into what Eren meant or even why he was here.

"So, what, you've just been sitting out here watching these two play?" Hange asked with a raised eyebrow.

"No," Eren answered flatly, pointing to the soldier that spoke. "I've been watching him cheat."

"I fucking knew it!" the second yelled, throwing down his cards in frustration and stalking off in rage.

"Oh, come on, did you have to squeal on me? I was about to win getting out of latrine duty for a week!" the first complained in frustration.

"You were about to lose," Eren corrected, nodding to the second player's discarded hand.

The soldier blinked, flipping the cards and paled at what he saw. "How did he have a hand this go-!? You know what, never mind, thanks kid," the soldier said, shaking his head as he picked up the deck of cards, quickly leaving the pair to some privacy.

Hange watched the exchange awkwardly before allowing herself to grow amused as the two soldiers stalked off. "Well, I'll try to remember you like to be up to greet the sun," Hange said with a small smile. "I don't suppose you want some breakfast?"

"I already did," Eren answered, pulling out a ration bar from his cloak.

"We have... better food than that, Eren," Hange offered hesitantly. Eren stared at her for a moment before opening the wrapper, munching on it beneath his scarf. "Right, right, fine," Hange conceded with a sign of resignation before a very important subject came to mind. "Hey, Eren? You do know where to go to the bathroom, right?"

Eren swallowed, giving her a strange look. "I already went," he informed, making Hange more than a bit wary.

"And where did you go to do your business?" she stressed again, trying to remember if she had a last will made out.

Eren shrugged. "I put the shit where the shit is," he answered bluntly, pointing across the courtyard.

Hange followed his finger and stared owlshly. "You took a dump in the horse stables?"

"No," Eren answered simply. "I took a shit in the shit bucket."

"Oh. That's... better?" Hange stated uncertainly before smiling hopelessly. "I... don't suppose you had toilet paper?"

"Yes," Eren answer with a nod.

"... What?" Hange asked with a furrowed brow. "Yes, what?"

"Yes, I had toilet paper," Eren said, reaching behind him to reveal a roll of toilet paper.

Hange stared with incomprehension. She was the smartest person in the entire survey corps, perhaps the entirety of humanity and Eren was stumping her with a simple roll of paper meant to wipe one's ass. It was a strange feeling. "Eren, where did you get that?" she asked tonelessly. The simplest answer was the bathroom, but why didn't he do his business there instead of walking all the way out here? And if not there, where?

"The basement," Eren answered honestly.

"... You got in the supply room!?" Hange hissed in shock. That door was suppose to be locked! "How did you get in!?"

"I opened the door?" Eren answered with a head tilt, as if it was obvious.

"... That raises too many concerns," Hange remarked, trying to nurse away a headache as she rubbed her forehead. "Okay, you have somehow mentally exhausted me in a morning. Something science can't do in three sleepless nights!"

Eren didn't say anything, merely waiting for her to finish.

"Okay, just to make this clear, you do know what a bathroom is, right?" Hange asked.

Eren nodded before giving her an unamused look. "There are a lot of doors and no signs here."

"We improvise a lot around here," Hange said, conceding the point. "So, now that, that-Hoi! Hey, hey, hey!" Hange called as Eren suddenly jumped off the barrel, grabbing him by the shoulder before he could walk off. "Where are you going now?"

Eren pointed to the southern wall with an irritated look in his eye. "I can hear someone."

"Hmm?" Hange blinked, looking up and straining her ears. There was a voice, and... it made her grimace in distaste. "I think I know what it is."

The pair walked up the stairs to the battlement, the voice growing clearer as they grew closer.

"Holy Goddesses, be a beacon in the dark, for we have lost your light and wandered into darkness!"

Clearer, but more annoying. At the top, they found few other scouts gathering with peeved looks on their faces.

"He's at it again, Miche?" she asked to the blonde man as she looked over the edge.

There was an old man, a preacher of the Church of the Walls, bellowing his sermon out while being surrounded by a small crowd of the faithful from Trost and other nearby places.

"Purge us of sin, and have mercy on our souls! Discipline us as you see fit, and let us depart from those that would deny your glory!"

"Yeah, this guy's been making trips out here more and more often now," Miche answered, wrinkling his nose.

"Well, not much we can do about it. They can't stop us from going outside the walls, but they can certainly spout their nonsense outside

our doors," Hange said with a sigh.

"They who deny your glory and sully your works, Your Divine Walls!"

"You know what, I'll take pissed off Levi over listening to this. I feel my genius rotting just listening to them," she said with a headshake. "Come on- Eren? Oh come on! Again!?"

"Umm, Hange?" Miche commented, tapping her shoulder. She looked to see him holding his nose closed while looking at the stairs.

She turned and looked owlish as Eren was standing there. With a very, very smelly bucket. "Eren, why do you have that?" she asked, looking disgusted.

In lieu of answering, Eren walked over to the edge and placed the bucket on the edge. Several of the soldiers started smirking at the prospect, making no move to stop him.

"Wowwowwow!" Hange called, grasping Eren and pulling him away from the bucket, Miche grabbing the handle while keeping his nose pointed away. "Eren, what are you doing?!"

"Let the unrepentant find home only with the wicked, knowing sorrow in the flames!"

Eren looked at her like it was obvious. "Putting the shit with the shit."

Hange blinked, her lips quirked as everyone started to smirk and chuckle, herself laughing as she patted his shoulder. "Eren, you're a smart kid."

"How the hell did he stand this stench in his face?" one of the soldiers asked as Miche took it back to the stables.

"I've smelled worse," Eren remarked softly, confusing soldiers yet again.

Hange took a deep breath, hoping Erwin explained things soon to the rest of the scouts. There were only so many times Eren could say things like that without someone asking what he meant. "Come on, let's head inside."

Miche grimaced as he entered the stables. One of the downsides to having a nose like his was situations like this. He shook his head as he placed the bucket down. He turned to leave, only to stop as something small flashed by his vision.

Scowling, Miche quietly approached the end of the stables, looking around the edge. What he saw just annoyed him. "Rats are back. And probably a cat. Levi will not be happy," he murmured, not envying the scout that had to clean this mess up.

The headless rat corpse had gotten blood all over the place.

It was nearly noon when Erwin summoned the entirety of the Scouts to the courtyard, himself standing before them while Hange, Miche, Levi and his squad stood to the side.

"I'm sure many of you have questions regarding our new guest," Erwin stated firmly. "The boy's name is Eren Yeager. He is a child we have found from beyond Wall Rose, a survivor from the Fall of Wall Maria."

Many murmurs and stunned looks were shared at that bold statement. "Commander, how is that possible?" Nanaba asked in shock.

"The details are unclear, due to Eren's mental state," Erwin answered, and knew he didn't need to elaborate. Every single one of them understood. "What we've gathered is that there was a group of survivors from The Fall, held up somewhere underground and scrapping by all these years by any means necessary. It appears that, however, their holdout was compromised in some way. Eren is presumed to be the only survivor, having wandered through the night

until we found him on the last expedition. Naturally, after all of that and five years of desperate survival, he is severely traumatized."

Most of them took that either stoically or with only a minor grimace, but some looked amazed yet disturbed by the notion. To survive that long, out there, in constant fear of Titans. Was that even living?

"Obviously, this has never happened before," Erwin continued. "I have already filed a report to the Military Police, to locate any potential family members or otherwise find a home for him. For now, he will be remaining with us. Continue your duties as normal; merely be mindful of his presence."

"And nobody touch the fucking scarf!" Levi called out in warning. "The brat will fight you on it, and he fights dirty."

"And If I find any of you bribing Eren with ration bars, you're lined up to help me with my experiments!" Hange yelled protectively.

Erwin smiled slightly as the Scouts gained surprised and curious looks at those reactions. "You heard the new parents."

Everyone tried desperately not to laugh at the joke.

"But in all seriousness, I am uncertain how long he will remain with us," Erwin continued. "Children are not a usual territory for most of us, but please avoid from making a scene and do not question him on his time before coming here."

No one needed the obvious to be stated. Some of them barely held it together mentally. Imagining a kid coming back from out there, in that hell, was mindboggling.

"Also, relatedly, someone left the supply room unlocked. As children are prone to wandering, do make extra care to keep all rooms with important or dangerous equipment locked," Erwin finished with a nod. "That will be all. Dismissed."

"New parents? Really, Erwin?" Levi asked with an eyebrow twitch.

"While my genius would be best passed on to the next generation, I am not sure motherhood is a boot I can fill," Hange remarked idly.

"Section Commander, you call captured Titans your babies," Gunther reminded with a sweat-drop.

"Yes, my babies, but not my children," Hange stated as if that somehow made a difference.

"I don't know. If not for the eye color, I would assume he was the child of you two," Erwin said in jest.

"I can see it," Miche agreed with a shrug.

"Et tu, Miche?" Hange asked dramatically.

"So. Where is Eren now, exactly?" Olou asked curiously.

"Petra volunteered to watch him," Levi and Hange answered in sync; Hange facepalmed at the coincidence, feeling amused eyes on them.

"Not a word," Levi grunted.

"We really need to organize a schedule of people to watch him," Eld remarked thoughtfully.

"You might not want to do that," Olou cautioned. "Kids, especially this one, need stability. Shifting him around too many people won't do him any good."

"But do we want him getting too stable here?" Gunther asked in concern. "Wouldn't that just mess him up more when he leaves?"

"Stop! You're all making me paranoid now!" Hange exclaimed, rubbing her head with a groan.

"I'm afraid I'll be of no help in advising this particular battle," Erwin confessed. "Still, Hange claims that Eren has proven elusive, even without intending to be. We keep him at arm's length and he may leave on his own before we realize."

"Ain't that a new low," Levi grumbled. "Having to worry about a brat sneaking past us."

"One last thing," Erwin said, looking to Hange. "Have you taken the time to examine Eren for any wounds that haven't fully healed?"

Hange eyes steeled, glancing around to make sure no one was eavesdropping. "Yes, I have. I'm still writing the report."

Olou sighed heavily. "It's... not pretty, Sir."

"What did I miss?" Levi asked with a scowl, feeling the uneasiness from those two.

"When Eren was taking a bath, me and Olou tried to... discretely give him a look over for wounds as he washed," Hange answered with a head shake. "Commander, that boy has been through hell, and I'm... not convinced Titans were the only part of it."

Erwin nodded grimly. "Just give me the summary for now."

"How he's in this good of shape is beyond me," Hange admitted. "But he hasn't been that way before. There are signs of many old wounds. Cuts, burns, stabs. Almost none of them major, just... enough to have some faded scars," Hange said before taking a deep breath. "The real issue though is, well..."

"He's got a massive scar of some sort," Olou carried on for her. "It's a pale line that goes around the torso like a hoop or something. Damn thing is thick too. He's got another on his left arm. I don't know what could have caused it, but it's... painful just to look at."

There was a silence over the group. "Fucking hell," Eld said in disbelief. "What did that kid go through out there?"

"Marks like that. Do you think someone... tried to cut him up when food ran out?" Gunther asked, swallowing thickly.

Levi didn't say a thing, just glaring murderously at the ground.

"Maybe it was humans, maybe not. Maybe he got injured and the scars are medical wounds from makeshift surgery. It's hard to say yet," Hange said with a headshake.

Erwin scowled in concern. "Eren might still have more trouble ahead of him."

Levi perked up in thought as he caught Erwin's meaning. "If that kid's got broken bones that were set wrong..."

Everyone, even Erwin winced at the idea of having to break a child's bones in an attempt to fix them. "We'll cross that road in time, once we're sure of what, if anything is still wrong with him," Erwin decided.

Hange nodded absently, mentally preparing herself for that possibility.

Later

Night had long fallen, the clouds shielding the light of the moon from piercing the dark veil. Still, the old preacher walked through the field without fear as he made his way to the village. His flock had long since departed, while he remained to pray. And in doing so, to beseech the fools of the Survey Corp to cease in insulting the Goddesses with their blasphemous ways.

He continued to murmur his prayers for protection, even as he heard rustling behind him.

"I shall fear no darkness, no demon, and walk proudly with your divine protection."

He continued on, praying reverently as he felt himself tested by the Walls themselves.

"O Goddesses, deliver me from the impure world into the goodness of your grace!"

The rustling got louder, but still he marched on even as he began to sweat.

"Let those ignorant of your ways be denied from your presence until they have renounced their ways, and come into your blessed light truly on bended knee!"

There was a growl now.

Finally, he turned, just as the moonlight came through an opening in the clouds.

He blinked, feeling relief through his body. "A child?" he said, seeing the small figure in the dim light. He smiled kindly, reaching his hand out. "Come, little one. Are you lost?"

"Mister, don't you know?" a voice called.

The preacher stared in confusion as the clouds returned and the light faded, but swore he saw... something moving around the small form.

His breath caught in his throat as the figure stepped forward.

"Your Gods Don't Want You~!"

End of Chapter

And there's your reminder that this IS still a horror fic. Hope you all enjoyed this little showing of the Scouts fussing and worrying over Eren, while the priest had an encounter with "something." More on that next chapter.

Until next time! And as always, consider tipping to my pat-reon!

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Spitz Ahead

Hell Overfloweth

Disclaimer: I do not own AoT

Levi was awake before the door even opened.

It was early. Or what others called early. If it was an emergency, they wouldn't be creeping in. If it was an assassin, they were piss poor at it. No rookie was green enough anymore to have a valid "I got lost" excuse.

Then he noticed the footsteps. The very, very small footsteps.

He stopped feigning sleep, looking over to see Eren staring back at him passively. "Can't sleep brat?" he asked neutrally.

"I can. You can't," Eren answered knowingly.

Levi would have been surprised by that a few days ago, but now he just sighed. "I bet you saw a lot of people with sleeping problems," Levi mused in understanding. He didn't want the kid's pity and the kid seemed to get that. That or it was just his default expression. "What do you want, Eren?"

"Someone died."

Levi couldn't have been more alert than if Kenny himself showed up. He looked to Eren sharply, seeing that the kid was serious. "Show me," Levi ordered sternly.

Eren nodded before heading out the door with Levi on his tail. It was fortunate for once that he didn't bother to change clothes at night.

Neither said a word as they walked, the base otherwise silent as they walked, save for some loud snorers.

Levi narrowed his eyes as they came out to the courtyard, but saw no body. It was dark though, the sun minutes away from peaking over Wall Rose. Where was he being led to? If it was anyone else, he'd think this was a trick.

Eren never paused in his stride, ascending the stairs of the wall.

"Oh, um, Eren, rig- Captain Levi?" one of the night guards greeted in surprise. "Um, come to join us tonight, sir?"

"No," Levi answered flatly, looking to Eren who was staring out over the battlement. "What are you on about, Eren? Where is it?" he inquired with his arms crossed. This wasn't some messed up prank, right? Was twisted humor how Eren coped? He sincerely hoped not.

"There," Eren answered, pointing out across the fields in the direction of the small village nearby.

"Huh? I don't see anything? What's going on, Captain?" the scout asked curiously.

"Eren, you can... see something?" Levi questioned with some skepticism, but a growing feeling that this kid was neither wrong nor joking.

"There is blood," Eren answered vaguely, looking up at Levi with a pointed stare. "A lot of blood. Too much blood. Someone died."

"Wait, what?" the watcher asked in alarm. "Sir, should I wake up Commander Erwin?"

Levi didn't answer, staring out across the field with a scowl. He wasn't Miche, he couldn't smell like a damn bloodhound. But even in the dark, something definitely felt off.

"Watch the brat and don't mention this to anyone. Eren, stay the hell here," he ordered, turning without another word.

Fifteen Minutes Later

It was a testament to their skill and experience that the Levi Squad was up, clothed, and ready to depart as quick as they were. The ones guarding the gate were a bit wary of opening the way, but few were willing to argue with an order from Levi. Now, they rode across the field as the sunlight began to peak over Wall Rose finally.

"Let me get this straight," Gunther spoke up. "Eren came into your room... and told you someone died?"

"Yes," Levi answered shortly. "He said there is a lot of blood out here."

"What, is he like Miche?" Petra asked in confusion.

"He might just have really good vision in the dark," Oluo mused thoughtfully.

"Doesn't matter," Levi stated simply. "All that does matter is finding out if he's right."

"You think he might be wrong or lying, Captain?" Eld asked with a curious scowl.

"Lying? No. Wrong? Who knows. Maybe the kid had a flashback or a nightmare. Maybe he's still trying to adjust and can't accept he's not in danger," Levi offered casually.

"Umm, Captain? I don't think he was wrong," Gunther spoke up, drawing their attention to him and following his gaze.

They were well over half way to the village now, and on a patch of grass was something dark and still wet.

Levi narrowed his eyes as they brought the horses closer. "Yeah, that's definitely blood," he agreed as he studied the amount. That was no small injury. A wound bleeding this much could be lethal without quick medical aid.

His eyes trailed towards the village, finding a streaking trail of blood with the occasional larger patches along the way.

"You think they managed to get to the village?" Petra asked, feeling less than hopeful for whoever this blood belonged to.

"No," Levi answered observantly. "Eren's right, this is too much blood. Whoever was hurt would have collapsed and bled out long before they made it."

"What should we do, Captain?" Eld asked.

Levi didn't answer immediately. This wasn't really the job of the Scouts, but it happened near their base, so investigating was justified if anyone on the food chain questioned their involvement.

"Gunther, Eld, with me. Petra, Oluo, head back and tell Erwin what's going on. One of you tell Four-Eyes where Eren is," Levi ordered.

He didn't need to look to know they nodded, hearing two horses heading off before the remaining trio continued following the trail of blood.

"... I don't see any foot prints," Eld stated with a bead of sweat on his brow.

"They deliberately dragged the body, using it to cover their tracks," Levi answered knowingly.

Gunther grunted. "Sir, isn't there a chance this is just a very messy hunting incident?"

"Are you that optimistic?" Levi asked rhetorically without looking back. "There isn't any thing this big out in these woods. We made sure of that. More importantly..." Levi paused, jumping off his horse for a moment, leaning down.

"You find something, Captain?" Eld asked.

In response, Levi held up a shoe with blood drops on it, silencing any doubt.

They rode on to the town, a place called Garm, following the path until the settlement was in sight. As was the crowd of people gathered on the edge. They were around the side of a building, muttering in loud and worried voices.

"What happened?" Levi's voice called out, silencing and surprising the group.

"The Scouts?" some of them murmured. Some in relief, others in distaste. Regardless, they made way for the three as they dismounted their horses and walked up to the wall of the building.

Levi's eyes widened minutely, Eld giving a sharp inhale as Gunther gasped.

The body was here all right. The clothes were dirtied, bloodied and torn viciously, but Levi was certain it was a priest. One arm was severed off at the elbow, while the other was impaled to the wall by the hand... with a broken piece of bone from the severed arm, the rest of the arm laying discarded nearby, the flesh having been peeled away as if it were a vegetable. The stomach was ripped open and something had been chewing on and eating the insides before anyone got here.

Most importantly... the head was missing, leaving only a bloody stump.

But the thing that captured everyone's attention, even Levi's, was the wall. Five times, in varying sizes, the same five words were repeated. All written in blood.

"Your Gods Don't Want You!"

Levi turned to face the crowd. "Did anyone see anything?" he asked sternly.

"N-no, sir," a young woman answered, pale as snow. "We... I and my husband found him first," she answered with haunted eyes. "He's with our daughter now... she saw this and... everyone came to look when they heard her scream. I just... I don't understand."

Levi nodded slowly. "Has anyone seen the damn head?" he asked, looking around to see many heads shaking and some only now glancing around for the missing body part.

No one seemed suspicious or stood out in anyway. If the killer was here, they were doing a fine job acting.

"Captain?" Eld questioned, unsure of what they should do now.

"The commander will be sending someone to check on the situation. This place doesn't have its own guards or anything to report this to. Eld, go to Trost and tell them there's been a murder here. We'll wait here," he instructed.

"Sir," Eld nodded, heading for his horse.

"Everyone, I need you to leave the area for now. The Scouts'll keep an eye on things until the MP arrive," Levi requested, hoping no one gave them trouble.

It was too early for this, for anyone.

"Do you... think you'll find who did this to Preacher Farn?" a man, no, a teenage boy asked with a wavering voice.

"At the moment, I just want to make sure they don't gut anyone else," Levi said bluntly, several people flinching, but starting to disperse none the less. "Hey, Kid? This house have an owner?" Levi asked, stopping the boy short.

"Huh? Umm, yeah, the Schuber family? Mr. Schuber is just around the side on his porch," the boy answered, his eyes flashing back to the body in morbid curiosity.

Levi didn't blame the kid as he scurried away with a paling face, obviously about to vomit. "Gunther, my people skills leave something to be desired. See what the man has to say."

"Alright, Captain. What are you going to do?" Gunther asked curiously.

"Enjoy the scenery," Levi answered ironically before turning back to the body.

Levi had seen a lot of dead bodies, seen a lot of different ways people could die. He could tell a lot just from looking at the corpse. The preacher hadn't died from beheading. There would have been a lot more blood all over the clothes, and all over the area, no matter where it happened. The killing blow probably wasn't the arm. This man probably died while being dragged, and the bloody path here would have been much narrower and thicker if it had all came out the severed limb. The primary wound to the stomach, perhaps, or even multiples of the lesser ones around it? Most likely. Could have also been a sliced throat, removing the head afterwards.

Which meant the beheading and impaling the hand were just done for shock value, to enhance the message around the dead priest of the Walls: Your Gods Don't Want You.

Levi had never heard of any radical anti-church group, but he wouldn't be surprised that they existed. Still, this was strange. He didn't buy into bullshit, but he usually knew propaganda when he saw it. This didn't feel like a rallying cry. Just a terror-tactic against the church?

Or perhaps a plot to frame the Scouts? Levi thought it was a stretch, but it seemed odd for an event like this to happen to the village closest to their base.

He turned his attention away from the body itself and towards the rest of the scene. There were no footprints. Whoever had done this had been confident enough to take time to cover their tracks before

vanishing into the night. But breaking a bone like that, impaling it through the wall? That couldn't be done silently. How much of this did they prepare in advance? That was an unnerving question to consider. Doing something like this in the heat of the moment was bad enough, but to plot and scheme it out? That was an entirely worse kind of mental case.

He didn't tense at the growl, having been aware of the creature's presence, but he did turn his head towards the animal.

There was a dog there. An odd one, for Levi. It was like a spitz, but with smoother and shorter hair. Brown on the top, almost white on the underbelly and face. Almost looked more like a fox than a dog.

It wasn't looking at Levi at all, busy chewing on something in its bloody maw. A rat by the looks of it. The hound chomped its jaws a few more times before turning to Levi. A short staring contest ensued before it tilted its head and began to walk off.

Levi watched it go, half expecting it to find the head as a snack, but then he stopped in surprise. He hadn't noticed it with the crowd here, but there was actually an outhouse a short distance away. Probably still on the property of the Schuber house.

Levi felt a pang of disgusting suspicion grow in his stomach as he rose from his crouching position, heading to the outhouse. He placed a hand on the knife strapped on his back, just in case this was worse than he already expected. He kept his footfalls as silent as possible while treading closer...

Before turning quicker than a viper, knife to a man's throat.

To Gunther's credit, he looked only mildly alarmed instead of terrified at his captain's reaction.

"Oh, Gunther, it's you," Levi said with a hint of apology in his voice, sighing as he sheathed his knife.

"On edge, Captain?" Gunther asked with a scowl.

"Just a feeling. What'd you get out of the man?" Levi asked idly.

Gunther shrugged. "Nothing much. He's pretty shaken up by it. He just keeps thinking about how he ignored the noise and how it could have been his kids this happened to."

Levi rose an eyebrow ever so slightly to that. "Why'd he ignore it?"

"Apparently, some people use his outhouse at night without permission. He just thought it was someone slamming the door," Gunther answered simply.

Levi turned back to the privy and slowly opened the door. Gunther nearly hurled and it wasn't from the smell.

"Well, we found the head," Levi remarked with a grimace.

Later

"... Well, I'm skipping breakfast," Hange stated with an uneasy smile as the report ended.

"Same," Petra said with a sigh as Oluo, Eld, and Gunther nodded.

Internally, so did Erwin. "The head of the Military Police at Trost sends his regards for preserving the scene as best you could," Erwin relayed.

"Along with a hint to not interfere with their business further?" Miche guessed stoically

"On this occasion, due to our proximity, they decided to keep us in the loop," Erwin stated. "I've already given word to other section commanders, to instruct their subordinates to keep a keen eye out for suspicious activity."

Which was also code for making sure none of the Scouts had gone off the deep end. It didn't happen often, but only because most would-be cases died before they became a danger to others.

"So, Eren could tell there was blood in the air?" Erwin changed tracks.

Petra shrugged. "That's what the Captain said, Commander."

"Interesting," Hange mused, stroking her chin.

"We thought he might be like Miche," Oluo mused, Humanity's Second Strongest frowning thoughtfully.

"I have some doubts of that," Hange stated uncertainly. "It's possible though. Perhaps that scarf helps block out too many smells. But I'm more inclined to believe that he simply recognizes the scent of blood above all else."

"We'll be leaving Eren's involvement in this situation out of the official reports, as I didn't see a need to mention him in this," Erwin stated pointedly. "On the topic of Eren, is he doing well, Hange?"

"I've managed to convince him that Ration Bars shouldn't be the majority of his meals, so, that's progress," Hange answered with a grin. "I've also shown him where the bathrooms are. But..."

"What is it, Hange?" Erwin asked encouragingly.

"He still sleeps under the bed," Hange answered with a sigh. "I don't think that'll stop soon."

"... You do know that's kind of normal, right?" Gunther asked curiously.

"Eh? It is?" Hange asked in surprise.

"You do remember she doesn't sleep without being reminded, right?" Petra reminded dryly.

"A lot of soldiers can't get use to comfy beds for a while if they've slept on harder surfaces for a long time," Eld explained.

"Give the kid a week or two, he's still adjusting to being... not out there," Oluo reminded in an assuring voice. "One of my siblings wouldn't stop sleeping upside down in a chair for weeks when we didn't have beds. Don't ask, long story."

Hange was listening with almost comedically serious attention. "I shall keep that in mind. Thank you for the information."

Erwin smiled for an instant before turning to the room as a whole. "If there is nothing else, you're all dismissed."

With that, the room began to empty until it was just two left.

"Something on your mind, Miche?" Erwin inquired with a glance.

The man leaned against the wall next to the window with a a troubled look.

Miche shook his head. "Nothing. Just glad I didn't have to find that head," he answered, wrinkling his nose. "Still, you think this is odd?"

"If you're asking if I think it's a coincidence that this happened this close to our base of operations? No, I don't. Neither does Levi. The goal is unclear, but they obviously wanted attention, ours or otherwise," Erwin mused. "I doubt we have seen the last of this culprit's work."

Miche said nothing, but agreed as he buried his illogical concerns for now. After all, a lot of people thought the Church and its priests were full of shit...

Meanwhile

"Drinks should be cold."

Levi had heard a lot of complaints and arguments against tea. That was probably the simplest yet most valid one he had ever heard.

Still, he shrugged, holding his tea by the top of the cup with the ends of his fingers. "Tastes shitty when it's cold," Levi commented as he and Eren sat across from one another in the dining room.

"You think ration bars taste shitty," Eren pointed out factually.

"They do," Levi stated firmly.

To his infinite annoyance, Eren calmly picked up his own cup of tea again and started to blow on it gently in an effort to cool it off faster.

"You are one cheeky brat," Levi said with a headshake. Eren ignored him, testing the taste of the cooling tea. "So... do you want to talk about anything?" Levi asked with some hesitation.

Eren looked up, giving him a blank expression. "Do you?"

Levi hummed at the retort. So, Eren could tell a fellow fucked up soul when he saw one. Good to know. "No," Levi responded, knowing that answer went for both of them.

An empty silence came over them both.

"How long do you sleep?"

Levi blinked, realizing it was Eren who asked the question instead of himself. "A couple hours usually," he offered, figuring it was something to talk about. "You?"

"I can sleep as long as I want. Anytime. Anywhere," Eren answered. Levi wasn't envious, waiting for the other shoe to drop. "If nothing wakes me up."

Levi nodded slowly. "And a lot of stuff wakes you up, doesn't it?"

Eren nodded. "People walking around me. Below me. Above me. Things falling. Animals. The wind. Sometimes just the wood creaking," Eren answered before giving an almost-smile. "Hange mumbling in her sleep."

"Four-Eyes still does that, eh?" Levi muttered to himself before taking a drink.

"Fire doesn't," Eren answered. "Fire and smoke. I can sleep through those now."

Levi frowned, not sure what to say to that. "You never answered my question this morning. Can you see in the dark?" he asked idly. Eren didn't answer, almost as if he didn't understand the question. Maybe he didn't. "Did you see anything that happened tonight?"

"... No," Eren answered, taking a long sip of his tea.

Levi hummed again. Was Eren lying or did he just have a good poker face?

"You don't believe me," Eren observed knowingly.

Levi grunted. Apparently, his own poker face wasn't that good, against a brat no less. Still, he raised an eyebrow at Eren all the same. "Force of habit. You believe us already, Kid?"

Eren looked down at his tea for a moment before looking Levi in the eyes. "I believe you want me to be safe."

"Why?" Levi prompted encouragingly.

"Because you got mad. Because I like ration bars," Eren said meaningfully.

Levi's expression softened for a moment as he recalled that numb moment where he saw a child weeping tears of joy over something as poor in taste as a ration bar.

His eye brow twitched, realizing that Eren's tea was now very cold and the kid definitely seemed to like it more now.

Cheeky brat indeed.

Elsewhere

They were everywhere.

She flew through the air, across the walls, from building to building. She killed of many of them, but it was never enough.

"Help!"

Her heard turned, eyes wide as she saw a girl in the grasp of a Titan.

"SASHA!" Mikasa yelled, flying towards her. But even as she sped towards her, the distance seemed to grow. Her heart pounded as her blades got within in millimeters of the nape...

"AHHH!"

But Sasha's head was already bitten off.

"Dammit!" Mikasa cursed.

"Someone, save us!" She heard Jean cry out.

But before she could turn, another voice called from another direction. "Hey, a lit-little back up over here!" Connie's voice came.

"Over here, we're just over here!" Krista yelled desperately from a rooftop.

There were too many. Too many to kill, too many to protect.

"MIKASA!"

Her body froze, turning to the blood-curdling cry of Armin, held over the mouth of a Titan. She pulled the trigger instantly, to save her oldest living friend, but her gas had run out. How? It didn't matter, as the Titan released its grip... and Armin was dropped in.

"No..." she whispered, clutching her head, begging this not to be real, for it not to be happening again, and again, and again.

"Why are you so strong?"

She froze. It wasn't real. She knew it wasn't real. He was gone. He couldn't be here.

But he was.

"And so weak?" Eren asked, walking in front of her. He was the same as that day, the same age and the same clothes... clothes coated with blood from the wound around his torso. His arm was missing, the stump still bleeding.

And his eyes. His eyes were gone, rivers of blood pouring from the sockets.

"You couldn't even save me," he mocked in disgust.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" Mikasa said, falling to her knees and curling into herself. "I tried, Eren!"

***"And I died!"** he roared demonically. "After everything I did for you, you couldn't do a damn thing when it mattered!"*

"I know! I'm worthless! I should have died instead of you! You were Carla's child, not me! Maybe... maybe Grisha would have stayed if you had survived," Mikasa sobbed.

***"I should have never saved you..."** ,* he whispered hatefully in her ear.

"I'm sorry, Eren. I'm so sorry," Mikasa whispered brokenly.

"Mikasa... Mikasa! Wake up, Mikasa!"

Mikasa shot awake, nearly taking Annie's head off with an instinctive punch. The blond caught it, but barely.

"... Annie?" Mikasa whispered with wide, uncertain eyes.

The passive girl nodded slowly, a hint of sympathy and concern in her blue eyes. "You're still in the barracks," she assured, gently and slowly releasing Mikasa's wrist and flexing her now-numb hand.

Mikasa's expression slowly melted into her normal expression, a mix of soft and stoic. "I'm sorry. Did I wake you?" she asked, as if nothing had happened.

Annie shook her head. "I was awake anyway. Just couldn't get back to sleep, with you tossing and turning like that," she admitted flatly.

The two weren't friends, exactly. They were classmates, and the two most skilled females here. There was some respect, some comradery, but they had little to say to one another.

Then again, maybe they were friends and just didn't feel the need to say it. Mikasa's social skills were not on the same level as her physical ones. And neither were Annie's.

"I'm sorry. I'll let you get back to sleep," Mikasa said tonelessly, about to turn over and hope for a dreamless sleep.

"Was it about... Him?" Annie asked cautiously.

Mikasa tensed but didn't snap. "In part," she admitted coldly.

"... Do you talk to Armin about the nightmares?" Annie asked with some hesitation.

"No," Mikasa admitted instantly.

"I won't tell," Annie assured with a troubled scowl. "I just..."

Mikasa looked over her shoulder with a hollow look in her eye. "Yes, Annie?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know what to say in this situation," Annie admitted with a sigh. "Nothing I can say will help. Offering to listen feels intrusive of me. Just sitting here would be more annoying than comforting."

"And why do you want to comfort me, Annie?" Mikasa asked pointedly.

"It's not pity or sympathy," Annie answered, glancing away. "I know what it's like, to be forced to run away and live on after a friend died."

Mikasa's dead look gained a tiny bit of understanding and acceptance. "Thank you, Annie."

"Don't get too mushy. I might hurl," Annie warned with the smallest quirk of her mouth.

Mikasa mirrored the expression as the other girl left, before pulling up the scarf over her mouth and laid back down.

She knew it wasn't real. The real Eren would never say something like what the one in her nightmares said. That didn't make it hurt less.

Only in these moments, enveloping herself in this scarf, did she recall what it felt like when her heart didn't hurt.

End of Chapter

There we go! As always, Eren walks a strange balance of adorable and creepy in this fic as we got to see what happened to the priest, and no one is sure what's going on there yet.

And we finally get a scene with Mikasa and... yeah, she's not doing good. Not much else to say. Enjoy the crumbs, until next times!

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Crappy Room

Hell Overfloweth

Disclaimer: I do not own AoT

"Another nightmare?"

Mikasa scowled at that, glad that Armin kept his voice down. They sat alone at a table in the mess hall, a norm for them. No one tried to eavesdrop on them, as far as she could tell. Except maybe Annie, who was taking side glances at them occasionally, but Mikasa didn't mind that one so much. She already knew.

Mikasa nodded shortly. "It's nothing new. It hasn't affected my performance before, it won't now," she answered with a neutral tone.

"It's not your performance I'm worried about," Armin stated in concern. "Mikasa, this is killing you inside."

"I've been dying for years now, Armin," Mikasa retorted without hesitation. "One more nightmare won't change anything now."

"... You know, he wouldn't want you here," Armin pointed out carefully as she froze. Objectively, he knew he shouldn't say anything like this. Mikasa was invaluable as a future soldier, anyone with half a brain could tell that. But he couldn't bring himself to care. All he cared about was Mikasa's wellbeing, and not just physically. "He'd probably tell you to go off into the interior and live a peaceful life."

"He would," Mikasa agreed idly. "And I'd ignore him. He would be here if he was alive, heading for the scouts. And so would I," Mikasa answered under her breath. "Besides, what about you? You're here too."

Armin smiled awkwardly. "I may not have been quite as loud about it, but it was my dream first, going beyond the walls."

Mikasa hummed in acknowledgement. "... It's my fault he died, Armin. You know that."

Armin scowled. "I know that you believe that. You blame yourself. Just like Carla and Hannes. Every one of you thinks you're the reason he died. But you're not," Armin answered, almost imploring her to finally accept this basic truth.

There was a long pause, straining the distance between them. Mikasa knew if they talked about *that* topic too deeply, they couldn't be ignored. "All I have left of him are these memories, Armin," Mikasa stated bluntly, burying the lower half of her face in her scarf, clutching it desperately. "How can I possibly tarnish his memory by just... leaving and running away? I don't... I don't think I'd sur-"

"Hey guys!" Connie called, plopping down next to Armin, eyeing Mikasa's covered face curiously. "What's a matter? Armin let a big one rip? Cause I'm sitting on the other side if so," Connie asked, leaning away from the short blond.

Armin smiled awkwardly as Sasha sat down next to Mikasa. "Too late, taken~" she said with a smile.

"Oh, don't pretend like there isn't room for three," Connie said with an eye roll.

The comical pair had taken upon themselves to befriend the "gloomy geniuses" as they were often called. Armin appreciated the effort and Mikasa didn't... rebuke them, so she seemed to accept them.

"I'm just trying to get a smell out of my nose," Mikasa lied with a straight face and level tone.

"Ooookay?" Connie accepted with a shrug.

"So, you guys heard the rumors?" Sasha asked eagerly.

"That Krista and Ymir tried using the maneuvering gear to, um, spice things up?" Armin asked hesitantly.

Sasha and Connie looked at him owlshly. "You perv!" Sasha accused quietly.

"W-what, I didn't start it!" Armin defended.

"Hehe, I got to know how you heard that juicy story," Connie said cheekily, his imagination going wild. "But no. You remember how Shaddis gave us that job of picking up our mail bags from Trost without horses?"

"After he heard you both imitating him and nearly popped your skulls, yes," Mikasa recalled, making both of them wince.

"Y-yeah, well," Sasha cleared her throat. "There's a weird rumor going around the city about the Scouts!"

"The Scouts? Didn't their last expedition come back with almost no casualties?" Armin recalled curiously.

"Yeeeeeep! And that's where things get strange. Apparently, they might have come back with someone new," Sasha said with a grin.

Mikasa paused, slowly sitting up in interest. "What do you mean?" she asked, giving Sasha a curious look as she pulled the scarf back down again.

"Well, if you believe the rumor, they found a kid outside Wall Rose. Deep outside," Connie answered with a grin. "A whole damn kid, out in Titan territory."

"That's," Armin trailed off, deciding there was no better word for it. "Impossible."

"Exactly."

Everyone turned to see Jean standing by the table, sighing while giving the two gossipers withering looks. "Don't you two pea-brains have better things to do besides share stories that are obviously not real?"

"Not really," Connie answered with a shrug. "Besides, even if it's not real, could you imagine? Finding a kid that survived out there all this time?"

Jean snorted. "Keep dreaming. I heard the stories too. Kid would have to have been barely more than a toddler to have been out there since the Fall."

"Wait, so, when they say kid, they really mean...?" Armin clarified dubiously.

"A brat. Stupid, right?" Jean said with a headshake.

"Well... it's possible, but extremely unlikely," Armin conceded.

Sasha and Connie grinned in apparent triumph while Jean sighed. "Now look, you encouraged them."

"How does a rumor like that start?" Mikasa asked quietly. "A cruel joke or a false hope?"

Jean stared in concern, glancing to Armin, who shrugged. "Who knows," Jean said neutrally. "H-hey, um, Mikasa? I'm planning on volunteering for the next Mail-Duty. Do you want to-?"

Armin winced apologetically. "I already did," Mikasa answered bluntly. "Armin and I signed up for this one."

Jean looked defeated at that, giving Armin a slightly annoyed look, but ultimately sighed. "Sorry, right."

Armin felt pity for Jean. It was obvious to everyone he had a crush on Mikasa, but Armin knew how destined it was to fail. Even if Mikasa ever opened up to another person fully, her heart was still

clearly aching towards someone long dead and gone. It wasn't healthy, but... the situation with Mikasa was so unique, he didn't have any idea what to say. Telling her to get over Eren's death was like...

... Well, it'd be like telling him to get over it as well.

"You going to eat that?" Sasha asked, pointing to Mikasa's largely untouched food.

Jean grunted, putting Sasha in a headlock.

"Hey, the hell?" Sasha said with a scowl as Jean knocked on her head, hard.

"You're an idiot, you know that?" he asked under his breath.

He blinked, looking over to see Mikasa leaving the mess hall. He let Sasha go in defeat, who glared at him suspiciously before pulling over Mikasa's food.

Armin smiled; despite Jean's doomed interest in Mikasa and the general natures of Sasha and Connie, he greatly appreciated having them around. They were good friends, they meant well and they helped keep Mikasa afloat more than they knew.

Maybe they kept him afloat too.

Meanwhile

"THAT LITTLE SHIT!"

The Levi squad was more than a little shocked as Levi barged into a dining room with a truly pissed off expression.

But not as much as every other Scout in the room, who jumped several feet back to avoid the wrath of Levi.

Except Hange, who was sitting with a curious look, and Eren in her lap, who continued eating his soup.

"Y-you okay, Captain?" Gunther asked nervously.

"You look a bit stressed," Petra said with a strained smile.

"Hoi, Levi? It's not nice to yell at yourself like that," Hange pointed out with a small smile.

Levi, for his part, completely ignored his team and the madwoman while marching up to her... and then picked Eren up by the scruff of his shirt.

All the while making sure not to touch the scarf at all.

"Hey!" Hange yelled, leaping from her seat as the soup spilled all over the table, glaring at Levi as she marched up to him. "What is your problem, you half-pint ass?!"

"Shut it, Hange! I need a word with your brat!" Levi yelled, not moving an inch as he glared into Eren's eyes.

The boy was not impressed, looking towards the table instead of at the angry man, "You spilled my soup," Eren noted with disinterest.

"I'm about to spill a lot more. Now answer this damn question," Levi demanded, his voice becoming very calm as his glare became an emotionless stare. "Did you put shit in my bed?"

Hange blinked, slowly, as everyone in the room gasped and paled.

Except Eren, who looked a bit surprised himself. "No?" he answered.

"Why is that a question?" Levi demanded.

"Why would I put shit in your bed?" Eren returned curiously. "There are bathrooms. And buckets."

Levi sighed deeply. "Because if it's not you, then I have severely misjudged my comrades," Levi explained, moving Eren to place him on the bench of the table, before directing a glare at the other Scouts in the room.

Now even Eren looked impressed, as Death seemed to loom over Levi, terrifying every soldier in the room.

"I-it wasn't me, Captain!"

"I would never!"

"I did not survive Titans this long to die by something so stupid!"

"Someone tell my husband I love him!"

"Please, have mercy! I have children on the way!"

"They're very loud," Eren said, rubbing his head while glancing at the cowering soldiers.

"Someone... put shit in your bed? As in actual, literal excrement?" Hange asked in bewilderment, trying to process who was stupid enough for that. "Was it fresh?"

"No, not most of it at least. Someone brought a whole damn bucket of horseshit up there and left it outside my room after putting the turds all over my room," Levi answered with disgust, pinching the bridge of his nose. "I'm not using that room anymore."

"Switch?" Eren offered, getting weird looks. He only shrugged. "I've smelt worse."

Levi chose not to say anything to that. "It's fine, Brat. I'm sorry I freaked on you," he said, patting Eren on the head.

"You like clean," Eren stated in a tone that somehow conveyed a profound understanding of Levi's actions.

Levi was a bit annoyed at how easily this kid read him sometimes, but appreciated the meaning. "Any chance you know which idiot did it?" he asked to Eren.

"You ruin his meal, manhandle him, falsely accuse him, and now you want him to help you?" Hange asked blankly, still clearly annoyed with Levi. In response, Humanity's Strongest pulled out a ration bar and held it out before Eren. "Don't bribe him with those, you ass!" Hange scolded angrily.

"I don't know who did it," Eren answered, ignoring Hange momentarily, making the scientist pout.

Levi sighed, giving the ration bar to Eren anyway. "Well, I guess I have some interrogating to do," he said, looking sharply to his squad, who flinched. "If I find out any of you did this, I am ***literally*** kicking you off the squad."

"Y-yes, Captain!" the four saluted quickly.

Levi grunted before turning to leave.

"Huh. You're actually going to leave this mess you made?" Hange asked, more surprised than upset now.

"I will worry about the spilled soup when I'm sure the actual **shit** is out of my room!" Levi called, slamming the door as he left.

Everyone let loose a deep breath, some collapsing to their knees or even giving praise to the Walls.

"You know?" Eld started, a bead of sweat on his brow. "I'd be insulted the Captain thought so little of us in... any other situation."

Petra nodded. "I didn't think anyone would actually be stupid enough to do that. I'd suspect everyone," Petra said, as Olou and Gunther nodded.

"Even those close to him," Gunther agreed.

"Especially those close to him," Olou added in.

There was a pause as they all slowly turned to stare suspiciously at Hange, busy cleaning up the soup. She met their gaze curiously.

"What, do I have soup in my hair?"

"They think you shit in his bed," Eren explained knowingly.

"WHAT?!" Hange yelled, glaring viciously at the four. "Oh, you have a lot of nerve, thinking I'd do something like that to Levi! Mud? Maybe, but real turds? How little do you all think of me?"

The Levi Squad shared cautious looks, keeping silent.

"Don't ignore your superior's question!" Hange demanded.

"With all due respect, Ma'am?" Olou spoke up with a grimace. "You are probably the only one who could do it and might not get slaughtered by the Captain."

"No. He would destroy her," Eren denied calmly.

"Eh? How would you know, Kid, you barely know him?" Eld asked with a furrowed brow.

"Because, he likes clean," Eren stated again, giving them all a blank expression, as if they were stupid. "And now his room is unclean."

Simple words never sounded so ominous.

"Is he always this strangely-wise smartass?" Gunther asked to Hange.

Hange just sighed. "In any case, perhaps you four should go help him clean up the mess?"

"Yeah, that's pro-" Eld started before stopping. "Section Commander? What's that in Eren's ration bar?"

"Huh?" Hange turned to look at the boy, and saw that the ration bar... wasn't exactly a ration bar. There was a gooey dark purple substance in the center of it. "Eren, what is that?"

"I don't know?" he answered with a head tilt, holding it out to Hange.

The woman bent down to sniff, then took a finger scoop and took a taste to confirm. "Hmm, it's jelly," she noted curiously

"Ohhhh, I know what that is," Olou said with a grin. "I get them for my siblings sometimes. There's a shop in Trost that makes Ration Sweets."

"Ration... Sweet?" Gunther repeated with a raised eyebrow.

"Yeah, it's just a softer ration bar, and filled with something like Jelly. A lot of places make military-themed stuff, especially in the outlying Districts," he answered, getting surprised looks. "What? When you have a lot of little siblings, you tend to learn this stuff."

"No, but... doesn't that mean that the Captain went out and bought one for Eren?" Petra realized, turning back to the boy.

Eren continued eating as Hange ruffled his head. "Aww, Levi does have a fatherly side."

"Says the mother," Olou muttered, Petra elbowing him in response.

"Well, we should probably head out and get your face cleaned up," Hange said, noting the smears around Eren's mouth.

"What about the piss?" Eren asked, making Hange stop short.

"Huh? What piss?" Gunther asked in confusion.

Eren, in response, pointed to the rest of the room, some still petrified against the wall.

Somehow, they weren't surprised to realize some people pissed their pants after the moment with Levi.

"We'll let them worry about that," Hange said, taking Eren's hand as she led him out. "Enjoy your food, everyone~!" she called as they left the room.

Hange waited exactly thirty seconds of walking before deciding they were out of hearing range.

"Okay, honestly, did you do it?" Hange asked in a serious tone.

"No," Eren confirmed, not sounding the least bit surprised by her question.

"Really?" Hange pressed, cupping her chin. "Strange. Someone had the guts to actually sneak a bucket of shit up to Levi's room and throw the stuff around his room?"

Eren didn't comment as they walked on.

"Did you like the treat?" Hange asked, changing the subject.

"... Yes," Eren admitted, almost begrudgingly.

"You're just annoyed it tasted better than a regular ration bar," Hange teased with a grin

And immediately regretted it, as Eren suddenly pulled away and started walking the other way.

"Wait, Eren! Come on, it was a joke!" Hange called in exasperation, but was ignored. "Come on, don't make me pick you up. Where are you even going?" she asked, blinking as Eren stopped in front of a stairway, staring upward. Hange came forth, peering around the corner, raising an eyebrow at the sight.

"Eren, Hange," Erwin greeted from the corner landing of the stairs, holding a bucket by the handle, keeping it away from his person. "I

don't suppose you know why I found this outside Levi's room?"

Hange stared for a moment, realizing that Commander Erwin was holding a bucket of horseshit. It was something out of a political cartoon from the papers.

"Someone threw shit in his room," Eren answered bluntly.

"..." Erwin didn't blink, but he did stare. "Is that a joke?"

"Unfortunately not," Hange answered with a wince. "You might have some soldiers needing medical leave in the near future."

"I'm more impressed he hasn't decided to cleanse the room with fire already," Erwin stated.

And by the Titans, Hange had no idea if he was joking or serious; mainly because she had the same thought.

"Well, I best return this before any more disasters happen, or it ruins anyone's appetite," Erwin stated, descending the stairs.

"I should make a pun about getting your hands dirty," Hange stated idly. "But it feels too obvious to say."

Erwin chuckled at that, pausing to furrow a brow at Eren. "Jelly?" he guessed with a smile, getting a nod. "Good day to you both," he said before continuing down

"Strange times," Hange stated as the commander vanished. Slowly, she looked down to Eren. "You don't think...?" she whispered conspiratorially.

Eren leaned to the side, eyeing the stairway down suspiciously. "I saw nothing," Eren decided very firmly.

"You are a very wise young man, Eren," Hange stated, patting his head in overdramatic pride.

Meanwhile

Levi glared in annoyance at the empty spot outside his door. He actually would have preferred the bucket of shit to still be there, if only to have something in case he found any turds he missed the first time. One might think it impossible for Levi to miss something as disgusting as literal, actual feces. And normally, they would be right. But normally, he didn't have a room filled with an unknown number of turds!

"When I find out who did this, I am going to break every bone in their body through mandatory daily hand-to-hand combat training with me," Levi muttered darkly.

With that comforting thought, he entered his soon-to-be-former room. All the bed sheets and such were on the floor in a bundle. He could still see the stains where they had been: some of the sheets, some under the sheets and on the mattress, one on his desk, and so on.

He scowled in frustration, wondering just who had the gall to pull something like this. There were only three possible motives and he wasn't sure which pissed him off more:

Motive One: Someone thought they would prove how "brave" and "cool" they were by trashing Levi Ackerman's room. There shouldn't be anyone that was still THAT kind of punk now, they didn't get more new recruits until after the next expedition. But it was possible, human egos were a stupid thing like that, and he would take no small joy in kicking it out of their ass if that was the case.

Motive Two: Someone that had an actual problem with him. He was self-aware; he knew his personality rubbed some people the wrong way. He knew this and he didn't care. Still, no one in the Scouts came to mind immediately as having reason to go this far. Still, if so, he wished the bastard had the courage to say shit to his face instead of throwing shit in his room.

Motive Three: Someone just wanted to mess with him. Someone was crazy and stupid enough to do this just because they could. And...

Okay, strike that. Obviously Motive Three pissed him off the most to consider.

Taking a quick breath to relieve some tension, he decided to look the room over once more. It wasn't hard, if only because he didn't have a lot of clutter: A desk, a dresser, the two standard bunkbeds, and a table by the window-

He paused, eyeing that. Had he left the window open? He wanted to say no. He usually would never do that if he wasn't cleaning, and he would have closed it when he went to hunt down some answers. But he could see himself rush to open it to keep the smell from sinking into the room too much.

Narrowing his eyes, he headed to the window and poked his head outside.

There was something down below; birds, crows if he was right, but some kind of scavengers at any rate. A couple of them were circled around something on the ground. It wasn't a person, it was far too small for that. Still, whatever it was, they were certainly enjoying it, all scrambling to get a piece of it.

He turned even before there was a knock on the door. "Captain?" Petra called. "Can we come in?"

"Sure. Mind your step," He called back evenly. He was minutely surprised when his Squad entered. Not because they were here, but because they had brought a lot of cleaning supplies. Just enough by his standards: Mop, bucket, sponges, rags, etc.

"We thought you might need a hand," Gunther supplied.

Levi's smiles were rare, but that was what made them special for those close to him. "Thanks."

End of Chapter

... Okay, yes, I just did that. I had someone put horseshit in Levi's room. Which sounds rediculous, but is now some grand mystery of who the hell was stupid enough to do that.

Meanwhile, Mikasa is about as much of a wreck as you expect, keeping herself together through stubbornness and sheer force of will. But now the question becomes, when and how might she cross paths with Eren once again.

PS For all those interested in more of my AoT works, I have a fic called "***Alternate Paths***" that is a series of oneshots for AoT. Many of them are potenital going to be full stories one day.

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Calming Ripping

Hell Overfloweth

Disclaimer: I do not own AoT

AN Okay, this seems to still be unclear to others. There was a timeskip back in chapter 1 between the fall of Wall Maria and Eren being found by the scouts. It's been five years, but Eren still appears to be the same age as when he was eaten.

"Moblit, why is Eren in the supply room?" Hange asked with a leveled tone, as if she were trying to imitate Levi.

Her assistant tilted his head. "He was already here when I arrived?" Moblit answered simply, looking to the boy in question next to him.

Eren was standing on a table that was pushed against a case of shelves. This allowed him to pull the various, thankfully safer supplies off it.

"Right, somehow that doesn't surprise me. I'm starting to think Eren just broke the lock," Hange said with a sigh, shaking her head. "So, why is Eren currently taking out all our toilet paper, spare cloaks, unused paper and what I think are the cleaning supplies I hid from Levi a year ago?"

Eren raised an eyebrow at the basket full of ironically dirty cleaning equipment: sponges, brushes, etc. Moblit was entirely unphased by that comment though. "He offered to help? And I thought you'd want me to keep an eye on him?"

"No, no, I get that and I appreciate it, but why are you doing it at all?" Hange pressed in confusion.

"You don't know, Ma'am? Captain Levi ordered everyone to check for a rat nest, and I got the short straw to check in here," Moblit

explained, rolling his shoulders a bit as he picked up a box off the floor.

"The rats are back? Again?" Hange said with another headshake, glancing to Eren. "Eren, have you seen any in your room?"

Eren shook his head. "Rats don't like me."

"I'm not going to try to understand that right now," Hange said flatly. "Now, why were you down here at all?"

"Someone said you hide the ration bars here," Eren stated with a displeased tone. "I was lied to."

"And you didn't just ask me?" Hange asked with her hands on her hips.

"I wanted to get it myself," Eren answered simply.

"To be fair, Section Commander, he seems really bored," Moblit stated in observation, Eren nodding in confirmation.

"Eren, I get that, and I'm sorry, but this isn't usually a place for children," Hange apologized.

"I know," Eren stated.

"And I don't know what kids usually like to do for fun," Hange continued, rubbing her head.

"I know."

"I... okay then," Hange said in awkward acceptance. "So, what DO you want to do, Eren?"

"I want these," Eren said instantly, holding up a box full of blank paper.

"What, you want to draw?" Hange asked curiously, but got no answer.

"Can... we even afford to give him that?" Moblit asked warily. Paper wasn't exactly in short supply, even now, but they still had a budget.

"I'll pay for more. I have a lot of money saved up," Hange assured proudly as Eren patiently watched the exchange.

"Ma'am, that is because you forget to eat. And buy new clothes. And bathe," Moblit reminded flatly.

"That is why you were ordered to remember for me," Hange countered dismissively. "Now, Eren- and he's gone again."

"Section Commander?" Moblit said, pointing behind her.

Hange blinked as she turned and found Eren waiting at the door for her with his box of paper. She turned to Moblit with a scowl. "Did you see him move?"

"Yes?" Moblit answered, confused by the question. "Didn't you?"

Hange's eyebrow twitched as she refused to answer.

Meanwhile

Armin had to admit, the mail visits to Trost were nice in a way. He wasn't a slacker at training of course, but it was nice to be back in the city again; being around people, hearing the commotion of everyday life. It was so peaceful here. Trost almost reminded him of...

Home .

He made a conscious effort not to sigh wistfully as his mind drifted to less pleasant memories.

Five years. Five years since the Fall of Maria. Three since they joined the military. The two years between those points were pure, undiluted Hell.

His eyes shifted over to Mikasa as she steered the horses pulling their cart. He still remembered when he found Mikasa and Carla, with no Eren. He didn't know who took it worse: Carla who cried until her eyes went dry, or Mikasa who remained silent and dead-eyed to the world for days and weeks. She ate, slept, and bathed but only when told to. Carla barely pulled herself together as the days went on, but she managed with help from Hannes.

If not for Mikasa to worry about, Armin didn't know what the woman would have done.

He remembered that one horrible day, when he found Mikasa alone one day, with a knife. His heart had dropped into his chest, thinking that Mikasa was that far gone. And a more... selfish part of him was afraid that his final friend would leave him alone in this pit of despair that humanity found itself in.

Even just thinking about that moment made him sigh.

"Tired?" Mikasa asked idly.

"No, I'm fine," he assured quickly, getting a pointed and knowing glance from her. "I was just thinking."

Mikasa didn't press him to answer, but he decided to anyway.

"That day with the knife," Armin answered with a weak smile, scratching his cheek.

"You thought I was going to kill myself," Mikasa recalled, a bit too calmly in Armin's opinion. "I didn't really think how it looked like at the time. I just needed to steady myself."

Armin nodded in understanding. He didn't get it entirely, just that clutching a blade helped her recall the night Eren saved her from kidnappers. Which was pretty easy for her to do given they trained with Titan-killing blades. If he was a more twisted person, it would almost be funny: Mikasa didn't clutch the knife because she wanted to die, but because she was trying to remind herself that Eren wouldn't want her to take such a way out, of the strength their friend gave her in life.

True, the scarf did that too, but... it was something easier to understand than it was to put into words for Armin.

Even from beyond the grave, Eren had a complicated influence on Mikasa... on both of them, if Armin was being honest.

"We're here," Mikasa stated as they stopped at an alley next to the Trost Office of Mail.

One of the only remotely good things about living within the confined space of the Walls for a century was that the Mail System had evolved rather rapidly and easily. While not every village got mail, they were usually a horse ride away from the nearest place that did. Post from the military and nobility took priority, but people could usually get a response within a month of sending a letter from one side of the walls to the other.

"Ahh, you must be the cadets for the post this time," the postman greeted idly, a middle-aged man sporting a curled mustache.

"Paperwork?"

"Right here, Sir," Armin said, pulling the folded document from his pocket, showing it to the man. He scanned it briefly before nodding, prompting Armin to return the paper to his pocket. It was basically just an official looking letter from Instructor Shadis, summarizing that "these brats are the ones to lug the letters back to base," more or less.

He remembered the one time someone lost the note. Mina was running laps until the sun rose.

With that, they were led to the backroom, where the man motioned to several bags and crates by the door to the alley. "That's all of them this time, along with the supplies for the horses. Unless they're actually making you kids eat that slop."

Armin chuckled nervously at that as he and Mikasa were left to begin working. And he was unsurprised to see Mikasa lift two of the crates at once, completely effortlessly. He didn't envy Mikasa's abilities per se, but his less than muscular nature made the vastness between their lifting ability greater than others compared to Mikasa. He sometimes wondered if Mikasa could lift a full horse and all his intellect couldn't decide if that was possible or not.

So he was a bit surprised to see her paused in carrying the supplies as he entered the alley. "Hm? Something wrong, Mik-?" he stopped, seeing someone sitting on their cart. Normally, he'd think it was a thief, but...

"Hello," the brown haired, hazel eyed child greeted with a curious look on his face. "I'm Calmer? The old man said you might need an extra hand, but I think he misjudged one of you," he introduced, eyeing Mikasa's load curiously... or maybe her arms, which were definitely stronger than they looked.

Mikasa glanced to Armin, who smiled apologetically. "Sorry, but we're not supposed to let anyone else touch the cargo," he explained diplomatically as he put the bag down in the cart. "Calmer?" he repeated with a head tilt.

"My parents had interesting ideas for names," Calmer answered evasively, sliding off the cart. "You mind if I just, you know, stand back here while you work? Old Timer said I'd get a bit extra if I helped you two."

Armin smiled and swore he almost saw Mikasa do so as well. It was nice, seeing children in their innocent mischief of youth.

"So, can I ask you a question about being a soldier?" Calmer asked curiously.

"Is it "have you ever seen a Titan?"" Armin predicted knowingly.

"What? No," Calmer denied with a scowl. "I just want to know how you don't vomit? You know, with the OMD-Gear?"

"ODM," Armin corrected automatically before looking sheepish. "It's funny you mention that. About a fifth of all those that drop out are the ones that can't keep their meals down."

"Wow. That must be hard on your stomach," Calmer mused.

"You get used to it," Mikasa said idly. "Usually, you have to worry more about things getting caught in the equipment."

"But... you wear a scarf, and have long hair?" Calmer pointed out with a scrunched brow, looking pointedly at the object and the hair trailing down to the middle of Mikasa's shoulders.

"Long hair is only a problem if it gets down past the middle of your back," Armin pointed out, pointedly not saying anything about the scarf.

"Okay?" Calmer said uncertainly. "So, how old do you have to be to join?"

"Do you want to?" Mikasa asked simply.

"No, but if I run out of options... ," Calmer trailed off.

"It's not for the faint hearted, but I understand what you mean," Armin acknowledged, knowing that sometimes soldiers were people who were just out of other options in life.

"Thirteen," Mikasa answered in a blunt tone. "Twelve, depending on your birthday."

"So, did you just join then?" Calmer asked, looking to Armin with a head tilt.

Armin smiled awkwardly. "No, I'm just... short," he admitted, tossing a final bag into the cart. "There, that's the last of it."

"We should head back then," Mikasa stated, nodding to Calmer.

"Thanks for the "help," Calmer," Armin said with a nod.

"Thank you for "letting" me," Calmer answered knowingly before heading inside.

"Well, he seemed nice," Armin remarked, getting a hum from Mikasa. "So, you think he really works here?"

"Not at all, no," Mikasa admit as she snapped the reins and got the horses moving again.

"Yeah, me either," Armin admitted with a sigh. "Let's just hope he was trying to steal something instead of leave us... something."

Mikasa nodded, taking a sniff of the air. Well, if something was left, it didn't stink at least, so probably not a turd or anything like that... probably.

The duo fell into a comfortable silence as they rode, as they were wont to do. It was always nice to have someone who understood what you were going through without constantly being asked about it.

"So, what's the first thing you're going to do after we graduate?" Armin asked as they began to exit Trost, back in Rose proper. "And don't say knit the scarf."

Mikasa hummed at the jab. "There's nothing in particular. There's a restaurant Hannes wanted us to visit. You can come too."

"Thanks," Armin said with a nod. "I'm finding a good lake or stream to just fish for a whole day."

"You rarely catch anything," Mikasa pointed out.

"Yes, but it's relaxing, and it feels like you're doing something while doing almost nothing at all," Armin countered sagely. "And if I do catch something, well, that's a delicious bonus."

Mikasa smiled a bit at that. Trying to fish had been one of Armin's attempts to get more food for them during the food shortage years ago. While he didn't have much meaningful success back then, he did enjoy the attempts. And that's all they had these days, small moments to take joy in.

"Hm? Mikasa? Why are we stopping?" Armin questioned as Mikasa pulled them over at a split in the road.

"I'd rather not hold it all the way back to camp," Mikasa answered with a straight face while climbing down.

Catching her meaning, Armin glanced to a tree Mikasa was heading towards before purposefully looking in the opposite direction, just to make sure he didn't see anything improper. The first year after the Fall of Maria had killed any embarrassment about impromptu bathroom breaks.

Mikasa sighed in literal relief as her bladder emptied, using a mercifully large leaf from the tree as an emergency tissue. She paused as she heard a horse head on by, before rising to pull up her pants. She glanced down the road, seeing the rider was had stopped to chat with Armin. They were from the Scouts, judging by the emblem on their back. The dark haired teen kept a critical eye on the pair before something caught her attention.

A foul stench. Was that her? Was she getting sick?

With a frown, she glanced down, seeing nothing obviously strange about her urine.

Then she noticed the real culprit.

"Hoi, everything okay? Did something break?" the woman asked, bringing her horse to a stop near the cart.

"No, everything's fine," Armin said with a polite smile to the bespectacled woman. "My friend is just taking a bathroom break."

"I swear, everyone uses that tree," she remarked, glancing in the general direction without actually looking at the tree. "Well, in that case, good luck on the road."

"You too," Armin called as the woman's horse trotted off towards Trost.

"Someone you know?" Mikasa asked after approaching as she climbed back up.

"No, just a Scout that probably thought our cart broke," Armin remarked, looking at Mikasa curiously. "Everything okay? You took a long while?"

Most girls would be more embarrassed by the question. Then again, Armin would probably be more embarrassed asking literally anyone else this question. "I'm fine. Just found something disgusting behind the tree."

"Oh? I guess that tree is a popular spot after all," Armin murmured, assuming it was a turd.

"No, that wasn't it," Mikasa denied as she got the horses moving again. She didn't need to look to know Armin was looking at her inquisitively. "It was a dead rat."

"A dead rat?" Armin repeated, a bit surprised that bothered her at all. They found those before, even in camp.

"It was old and decomposing. The smell surprised me," Mikasa explained. "I'm surprised no animal ate what's left of it. It must have been there for days."

Later

"Well, I hope you're happy, Eren," Hange said as she entered his room, rubbing her neck. "I bought replacements for all the paper I gave you, so I hope you- eh?"

Hange half expected Eren to not even be there when she looked around the room. The other half thought he would be scribbling something on the paper.

She did not, exactly, expect to find Eren ripping the paper apart.

Eren paused in mid-rip, giving Hange a glance before continuing in his tearing.

Hange watched with confused interest as Eren took the ripped piece and placed it on the floor. And then another, and another.

Carefully, calmly, Hange moved closer while trying to figure out just what Eren was doing. He wasn't stacking, and they were all arranged on the floor very neatly. So he was obviously trying to make something, but she wasn't sure what or how she was even supposed to look at it.

"It's not done," Eren answered bluntly, not even glancing her way this time.

"Uh-huh," Hange accepted, tilting her head to see if a different angle helped. But all she saw was randomly arrayed fragments of paper. What could he possibly be doing?

Still, if he was doing... whatever this kind of art was called, that at least meant they shouldn't have to worry about giving him more paper too often.

"You were gone a long time," Eren noted with an interesting tone to his voice.

Hange started for a second. Was that concern in Eren's voice? That was... nice to hear, for multiple reasons. While she appreciated the sentiment, she was happy to know Eren's emotional state was, well, better than it could be. "Oh, nothing, it just took a while to find the paper at the Mail Office. You'd think the guy running the place would have some help."

Eren hummed, but didn't say anything, apparently accepting that.

"So, soup, bread, milk, and a ration bar?" Hange guessed with a smile.

Eren nodded as he continued his work. "Cold tea if he has any."

"Ha! So that's what Levi was grumbling about," Hange said with a grin, patting his head as she made to leave.

"Hange." She stopped, looking back at the boy, who tilted his head up at her. "Did you find Mikasa yet?"

"Huh? No, I'm sorry Eren, but it'll take a few days before we can even get a proper search for her," Hange explained apologetically.

"Are you sure?" Eren asked with narrowed eyes, frowning behind his scarf.

Hange blinked at the pointed question. "Do you think I'm lying, Eren?"

"Hmm," Eren paused before shaking his head. "No. Just a feeling."

Hange suppose she shouldn't argue with that. Still, this person couldn't be too hard to find, with a unique name like that. Or spotted for that matter, as they were probably wearing a red scarf, by what Eren said.

Hange hated to disappoint Eren, but what were the odds she managed to miss noticing someone like that?

End of Chapter

There you go, another chapter of Eren being adorable and creepy. bit a;sp sp,e to,e woth Mikasa and Armin. Yeah, the last five years have definitely fucked them up a bit, but they also understand each other pretty damn well as a result, same as canon, but... a bit more due to not having Eren around.

And Eren is doing some kind of arts and crat project apparently.

As usual, you can find some of my AoT oneshots in my "Alternate Paths" fic.

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